















*Light On a Hill*



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*by*

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**LIGHT ON A HILL**  
*by CLARK DUNCAN*

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## **DEDICATION**

To my beloved daughter

**MARILYN**

who died March 2nd, 1943

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*"I will not believe that she is dead.  
She dwells with God, for Jesus said:  
'I go to prepare a place for you so  
that where I am ye may be also'."*



## 1

WHEN Vane Cheltenham alighted from a pullman in Hillsboro, Missouri, one bright June afternoon, he knew nothing of the country to which destiny was calling him. Paramount in his mind was the thought that he'd soon be launched upon his life's work. Gazing up and down the red brick platform, he spied a decrepit brown bus standing at the east end of the station, and he walked in that direction. It was an old and weather-beaten conveyance, with a rack on top for baggage and mail.

"Is this the stage to Seven Corners?" he inquired of the strapping sandy-complexioned Missourian driver who was standing alongside the vehicle.

"Tain't nothin' else," replied the driver briskly, seizing his satchel and motioning for him to get in.

Vane handed the man his baggage checks and climbed into the rear of the bus. It was an antiquated affair with a long seat on each side worn slick from much use. He quickly perceived that one other passenger besides himself was making the journey to Seven Corners. A young lady, perhaps twenty-one, with brown hair and blue eyes, sat huddled up near the driver's seat. From where he sat, he could study her without being observed, and he approved of her from the trim leather pumps that she wore to the natty looking hat perched on one side of her head. Attired in a neat-looking navy blue suit with a short jacket, she bore the look of one who came from a world far beyond the rugged hills of Missouri. He was quick to note her intelligent-looking face, her bright, tender-looking

eyes, which seemed to reflect sympathy and understanding. She appeared quite self-possessed. She smiled pleasantly when he entered, then buried her face in a magazine.

A train pulled in from the West, but no more passengers arrived enroute to Seven Corners. The driver gave the crank a few turns, the engine sputtered, and the old bus started with a prodigious jerk, which almost threw the passengers from their seats. Barely moving at first, they gained momentum swiftly, and were soon speeding out through the hills. There were many bad places in the road to be avoided; ruts deeply channelled by downpours of rain made travel difficult.

"The old road is mighty bad in spots," the driver remarked. "Folks ain't any call to foller a rough trail like this to do than tradin' like they used to. Thar's a rock road that takes 'em to Hadleyville a heap easier."

Over rugged peaks and across glistening streams, the old bus swayed dizzily along, carrying them into the very heart of nature. It was an ideal day to travel. It was June with its glory of green growing grass and blooming flowers. Reared on the Kansas Prairie, Vane found the timber country vastly interesting. He was a great lover of nature, and the wooded hills and clear streams held a great allure for him. There came to his ears the song of the cardinal; that of meadowlark and the pewee. From the hills he caught an occasional glimpse of fertile valleys below with fields of waving corn. Surely, this must be a land of enchantment, he thought.

He glanced toward his companion, and suddenly their eyes met in a quick appraising glance. Her gaze was direct, simple, and friendly. There was a quirk of humor in her straightforward blue eyes, he noticed, and her brown hair glistened under her small hat. So friendly did each seem to find the other's expression, their faces almost simultaneously broke into a smile. He didn't want her to think that he was a loquacious person—a man overly anxious to make the acquaint-

tance of women, but it seemed a shame that two young people, traveling through such a marvelous country, in such close proximity to each other, should not be congenial. He decided to risk an observation upon the beauty of the view.

"Charming country!" he exclaimed, gazing toward the landscape. His companion smiled, and her eyes softened a shade; enough so that his wandering glance, returning to her, caught the unqualified friendliness of it, which told him that she wasn't offended at his remark.

While he was thinking up something else to say, she turned to him and said in a rich voice:

"Traditional hill people live through here."

Elated because the ice had at last been broken, he stared at her and smiled.

"And are they a happy people?" he queried.

"Oh, yes, very much so," she returned. "Our wants are few and simple."

He was somewhat surprised that she included herself in her reply, for he hadn't connected her with that part of the country. Her eyes were singularly fresh and honest, and he could readily see that she was refined and educated. He ceased to be embarrassed, and noticed that she wasn't in the least backward herself. She was ladylike and polite. If she looked another way when he spoke, and seemed not particularly to hear him, he presumed that it was because her thoughts were with her loved ones with whom she'd shortly be reunited. To meet a young lady with such a charming personality was wholly unexpected.

As they talked a little more, he sensed that she was quite well acquainted with the country. She pointed out many places which proved to be of interest to him, and willingly gave him the benefit of her knowledge. The road led past huge orchards, half-cleared forests, and timber land. Occasionally they passed a farmhouse, constructed from native logs

which had obviously been hewn and laid by sturdy pioneers. Flowers bloomed in profusion about the houses, and tall honeysuckle climbed the porches. Often the whole family would be out to watch the bus go by. The driver waved them a greeting.

The bus slowed and came almost to a halt on a hill, but by some clever shifting of gears, the driver managed to make the grade in low speed. There was a loud rattle in the engine which appeared to be causing him considerable anxiety. He stopped occasionally, raised the hood and made a few slight adjustments, then rushed back to his place in the driver's seat.

"Looks as though we might get stalled," said Vane, laughing boyishly.

His companion smiled gayly at him and said:

"You get used to this after you've made a few trips back and forth. Joe there has been driving this bus for years. He's a trifle slow at times, but always gets you there."

In this conversation, Vane casually remarked that he was a minister on his way to take charge of the pastorate in Seven Corners.

A surprised expression came into her eyes.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "my name is Blake—Dolores Blake, we have long been connected with the church in Seven Corners."

"My name is Cheltenham—Vane Cheltenham," he replied.

Then she laughed.

"Pardon me, but I'm going to be quite frank with you. For the past few moments, I've been studying you, wondering what your business was in Seven Corners. I had no idea that you were a minister. You're so young-looking."

He explained that he had but recently been ordained, and that this was to be his first charge.

"I don't wish to discourage you, but the task that lies before you is not an easy one." Her manner was decidedly more

sociable now. "We've had great difficulty in keeping a pastor in our town. They either get discouraged and resign after a few months or else leave by request. Our people don't hold together very well."

"What seems to be the trouble?" he asked soberly.

"Well, that is difficult to say," she said, the frank, friendly smile still on her lips. "A few years ago we merged with another denomination; since then we've been split up. I've often thought, though, that a man with the right sort of personality could reorganize it and build up a strong church."

He was silent for a moment, then raised his head and said: "Have you always lived in Seven Corners?"

"Oh, yes, I was born there. The past four years I've spent in college in the East, but I'm very happy that I have finished and am on my way home."

"You expect to remain there then?"

"Oh, yes, I'm a great home lover; besides, I feel that we owe a great deal to the town which gave us birth. I don't think that anyone is quite as happy as among his own people. And I just love these old hills!"

Vane learned that she could talk on almost any subject. She told him of Seven Corners; asked him where he came from, told him of the affairs of the church, and he soon found himself telling her things which he had never told anyone before. She seemed to understand so readily, to reply so quickly.

When they had traveled some distance, the road turned curiously in one place, and a little village came into view. They were approaching the sleepy little inland town of Seven Corners which had never felt the rumble of a railroad train, visible only as a collection of fantastic roofs. High on a hill, a church spire gleamed like a silver streak in the heavens.

The girl glanced at herself in the mirror, pushed a stray curl up under her hat, and made ready to alight.

"We're nearing our destination," she informed him. "You'll find that Seven Corners hasn't advanced much from the horse and buggy days. There's the church up on the hill there. May I express the hope that you'll like our town and remain with us a long time."

Vane smiled.

"Thank you—thank you so much!" he replied cordially.

As the bus swayed into the village, Vane could see that it was a place of but little importance. A narrow street, arched with huge Elm and Silver Maple trees, many one and two-story houses, dating many years back, and badly in need of a coat of paint; some in the home-like pioneer style, some with large verandas circling the house. The business section, he observed, consisted of many odd-shaped buildings, several boasted the pretentious false fronts of small towns, several sagged disconsolately with broken or boarded windows.

The arrival of the bus always created a sensation in the main street of Seven Corners. It brought the mail, and was their only contact with the outside world. When a stranger alighted from the conveyance, he was an object of close observation by the many idle men who loitered on the sidewalk.

Dolores stood on the steps of the bus and looked about. Spying an elderly gentleman standing in the door of the newspaper office across the street, she yelled:

"Dad!"

The man hurried toward her, his gray hair blowing in the wind.

"My own Dolores!" he exclaimed, clasping her in his arms. "What a surprise!"

"I came a few days earlier than I expected," she explained, her arm still around his shoulder. "I wanted to surprise Mother." Then, seeing the young pastor standing close by, gazing up and down the street, she added: "Father, I want

you to meet our new minister, Brother Cheltenham. He came by the bus from Hillsboro."

"Well, well, another surprise!" said Mr. Blake, clasping the young pastor's hand warmly. "Allow me to bid you welcome."

Vance studied the girl's father for a moment. His slender form was accentuated by a pencil-striped blue suit which fitted him so perfectly that it looked as if he had been molded in it. His face was colorless, his eyes a faded blue. They peered out with keenness from behind shell-rimmed spectacles. He liked him readily.

"Thank you—thank you," he returned. "I had a nice visit with your daughter coming over on the bus. You're to be congratulated."

After a few moments conversation between the two men, Vane was directed to the home of the widow Moss, where Mr. Blake assured him he would find a home. He made his way down the street unmindful of the many curious glances that followed him. He observed that the house to which he had been directed was a hospitable looking place. Painted white, with green shutters, the straight lines of the building were softened by the swaying limbs of a heavily leaved maple tree that hovered protectingly over it; by the trellised morning-glories at the front porch, and the large rose bushes at its corners. He entered the gate, walked boldly up to the front entrance and rang the bell.

The door opened and he faced an elderly lady with bright blue eyes and gray hair. Her mending was in her hand, her steel-rimmed glasses set rather far down on her nose. Her face brightened when he introduced himself.

"I'll declare but this is a surprise!" she said pleasantly. "I knew there was a new pastor coming, but I'd never have identified you as one when I saw you coming in at the gate."

There was a real welcome in her smile, and Vane exulted.

"My looks deceive me, I reckon," he returned.

Mrs. Moss was wearing a dark colored dress of cotton material, faded to the faintest hue, her coarse and untidy shoes just visible beneath her skirt. She apologized for her appearance.

"I have two nice rooms there on the front which I can give you for your bedroom and study," she said. "You can feel at home here."

He did already. The study looked cheery and comfortable with its red walls and polished furniture. There was a fireplace on the north, and a large window that looked out upon the church yard. He liked the place immediately, and he liked his landlady. He sensed that she was a woman who possessed a strong love for God and for the church. There was an air of simplicity about her that was new to him, and he felt that he had got home.

"This is my daughter, Elva," said Mrs. Moss, presenting a seventeen-year-old lass with blue eyes and curly brown hair clinging close to her head.

Vane nodded pleasantly and shook hands. He observed that the two blue eyes had plenty of mischief in them.

Mrs. Moss busied herself getting dinner.

"Set the table in the dining-room, Elva," she enjoined. "And open up some pear preserves."

Elva got busy at once, casting furtive glances toward the room where the new pastor was seated. Then she turned the meat on the stove, placed the buns in the oven to warm, and mashed the potatoes.

"I should have a salad of some sort, I suppose," said Mrs. Moss, chopping up some celery. "Did you stir the gravy, child?" She moved about with such quickness that her motions seemed to be full of vibrations.

Vane relaxed his muscles and drew a long, deep breath of sheer content. He inhaled the odor of good food and his smile deepened. The long trip had made him hungry. When

the meal was served, he ate ravenously, quite pleased with the quality of the food. He soon felt quite at home with Mrs. Moss and her daughter. The very simplicity of their lives appealed to him.

Vane was a man whom the average person would term as being peculiar. In his boyhood, he took no interest in the diversions sought by the average youth. He had always been serious minded and deeply religious. It could not be said of him that he avoided the girls, but the truth of the matter was that until he met Maxine Markley, Librarian at the Divinity School which he attended, he had never imagined himself in love. Maxine was a slender blonde, with clear and sparkling blue eyes, coupled with a kind and sympathetic manner which she used to charm the lonesome young Bible students. Partly from environment and the lack of social life, she and Vane were thrown much together. However Maxine did not seem much enthused over his choice of a profession.

"You might have been a great lawyer, a great doctor, in fact, you could have been most anything you chose," she had remarked to him one day. But he loved the things of the spirit, and preferred the ministry to all other professions. Maxine had invited him to her home, flattered him, and when he was ordained and assigned a pastorate in southern Missouri, she was reluctant to give him up; and when he finally did leave, it was with the understanding that he would return some day and claim her for his bride.

After dinner, Vane seated himself on the veranda and fell to musing over the task that lay before him. A feeling of loneliness engulfed him. He felt the heavy responsibility that rested upon his shoulders. But he would rely upon God to direct and to guide him.

Looking out over the town, he wondered what sort of life was exemplified there. He sincerely hoped that it was a

place of amiable, affectionate people who loved the Lord. Here and there a dim light flickered from a window, and he sat staring with idle concentration. Restless, he rose and walked to the gate. He sighed, pondering over what he should do first. No matter what sort of life he found there, he realized that he must enter heartily into it, and point the way to true Christian living. As he stood there, a peculiar feeling rose within him — a message from God which seemed to tell him that he had a great task to perform—a great mission to fulfill.

"I will be faithful, so help me God!" he muttered, and with this thought in mind, he entered his study and set to work on the first sermon to be preached in Seven Corners.

## 2

HIGH on the crest of the hill it stood; the old church could be seen for miles about the hill country. Painted white, with ivy clinging to the walls, and with a long row of stone steps leading up to the entrance, it looked inviting.

To this old church came young Vane Cheltenham, fresh from a Divinity school, with a heart full of enthusiasm and a desire to preach the Christ he loved. With his powerful physique, and his cultured bearing, he looked more like an <sup>actor</sup> than a minister of the gospel.

Many of the citizens snickered when they saw the young minister on the street.

"What's a dude like that going to do here?" one asked.

"He arter be a-runnin' a beauty parlor 'stead o' preachin'," Ezra Doolittle averred.

From the moment Vane entered the old church, he loved it. He hoped to build it up into a beautiful organization. When Sunday came, the auditorium was beautifully decorated with flowers and blooming plants. The choir seats were all taken, and Dolores Blake was at her old place at the organ.

The new pastor's arrival had been given wide publicity, and the church was well filled. Many who otherwise never came to the church were there now to size up the new preacher. Many had doubts that a man so young, so inexperienced, could successfully preach the gospel and lead the people to Salvation.

When Vane rose to face his congregation for the first time, he felt inadequate. It pleased him immeasurably to see the

pews packed to capacity, but he knew, of course, that many had come from curiosity. He choose for his text 2 Cor. 5: 17 "IF ANY MAN IS IN CHRIST, HE IS A NEW CREATION; THE OLD THINGS ARE PASSED AWAY: BEHOLD THEY ARE BECOME NEW."

He admonished his hearers to go to Christ for shelter and salvation; to take refuge in His atoning work and be in Christ, as the branch is in the vine, for strength and supply; in Christ, as the members in the body, to give sympathy and service.

In Him we become a new creation. In Him we find a new life. Born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. This new creation means a new mind and we become able to comprehend something of the character and power of God in Christ Jesus.

This new creation means a new heart. And the affections that were alienated from God are now centered in Him. The new creation means a new spirit, the Spirit of God, which now bears witness with our spirits and which gives us unity of purpose in service and testimony.

And this new creation gives us a new song. It is the great song of the redeemed one upon whom is bestowed the Divine love and grace of a merciful Savior.

"Old things are passed away; behold they are become new." We get a new view of sin and a new view of self and of life. Jesus Christ is no longer a Savior waiting for us at deathbed, but a present, living reality in our daily life. Worldly interests pass away, and new interests are being awakened.

In the old life the pleasures and profits of the world were the objects of our desires, but now the desire is to do His will. It used to be the place of amusement for self, but now it is the workshop for Christ.

This door into the new and better life stands open for all. "Any man," no matter how weak and helpless, no matter how sad and sinful, "any man", no matter how old and for-

getful, if he steps out of sin-ruined self into Christ, will become a new creation. For, in Christ, God is reconciling the world unto Himself.

In closing, his voice softened as he said:

"Friends, it affords me great pleasure to be with you. I soon hope to become acquainted with every man, woman and child in the congregation. I want to help you find Him, Whom to know is eternal life." The room was very quiet. The sun broke through the clouds, and the sunlight drifted in at the windows. With all the earnestness that he could command, he prayed that every soul in the house would find Jesus; their lives be enriched by a closer contact with Him.

The congregation, their heads bowed, were greatly impressed by the earnestness of the appeal of their young pastor.

The services over, the preacher was directed to the church parlors where he was welcomed by the members of his congregation. Young and old gathered around him. He could tell by their faces that his first sermon had impressed them, and he was thankful.

After the service he had the pleasure of renewing his acquaintance with the charming girl whom he had met on the bus, for her mother had invited him to dinner. Climbing into the family car, they soon arrived at the home of the Blake family. Three generations of Blake's had seasoned and mellowed it by frugal and industrious living. One would guess that the first Blake who had built the house came from the South; wide, vine-draped verandas with white pillars, and ample welcoming doors, bespoke this fact. The lawn, flower-bordered and deliciously shaded by high-branching Silver Maple trees, sloped away from the house in swelling greenness to a street, while at the rear, there was a grape-hung arbor, and a rustic summer house.

It was to this house that William Blake, the Third, had brought his bride Mollie; here their two children were born,

and here Mollie had developed into the highest type of wife-hood and motherhood. To know her was to love her.

Dolores, just fresh from a college in Massachusetts, was quick to take up her old friendships. She had a friendly and agreeable nature and possessed a true humility of heart. The girls in Seven Corners all looked up to her, and she became their leader in matters of manners and morals.

Tom was the only son, just out of High School, and was now helping his father in the office of the *Sentinel*. Tom was a fair-haired, pleasant-faced chap, who enjoyed life to the full. He was an all around athlete. On the football field and the tennis court, he had won great honors for the Seven Corners High School.

Mollie Blake's was a busy life. When her children were young, she had tried hard to impress upon them the importance of putting first things first, and tried to instill into them a high sense of sound values. Filling the Library with good literature, she took care that no trash ever found its way there. "I want my children's lives to be enriched by studying the works of great men," she often remarked.

She was fond of her son, and during one of their confidential talks, she told him: "There are no heights which you cannot attain, Tom, if you'll equip yourself to take advantage of your opportunities. You must go in for pursuits that will enable you to get the most out of life and grasp its fullness."

Tom adored his mother. When any difficulty arose which demanded an explanation, he confided in her, and she always understood.

The furnishings of the Blake home were nothing elaborate, but they had everything that was needed. An intellectual atmosphere pervaded the place. There were plenty of good books, an upright piano, a good painting or two, and many blooming plants. Mollie kept the house spotlessly clean, and she did the work herself. She prepared many tasty dishes

for her family, and they had good times together. Tom, in his fondness for jokes, spared no one. He often chided his sister about Professor Dunlap, whose blunt manner was an object of ridicule. The Professor had tried to court Dolores when he first came to town, and he took a singular delight in reminding her of the affair.

It was left to Mollie Blake to take the lead in church affairs. No one else, it seemed, cared to assume the responsibility, and it was she that had planned the reception for the young pastor, and invited him to dinner. Dolores had praised the young minister highly, and they were all much impressed with his first sermon.

"Mrs. Blake, I appreciate being a guest in your home today," Vane remarked as he entered the house. "You are most considerate of strangers." He stood there with his hat in his hand, his face beaming.

Mollie looked neat and trim in a plain blue house dress with a ruffled white apron tied around her waist. Her gray hair was trimly waved, her blue eyes friendly. Vane quickly perceived from whom Dolores received her graciousness. It was from her mother.

Mollie's face brightened at his words. She took his hat and said:

"I thought perhaps you might feel lonely, this being your first Sunday with us. We've been quite busy this week getting the different organizations together, and I was quite pleased with the turnout this morning; and it isn't necessary for me to add, quite pleased with our pastor as well. I trust that you'll feel at home among us." She motioned him to a seat near the window.

Vane, pleased at the thoughtfulness of his hostess, smiled and said:

"For some reason, Mrs. Blake, I felt at home the very moment I entered your door."

"That's just the way we want you to feel, Brother Cheltenham," she said kindly, fumbling with her apron strings. "We're not bothered with so many conventionalities, and we try to make our guests feel at home."

Vane's smile widened.

"I see that I'm going to like it here, very, very much," he said in a voice full of appreciation.

Dolores, wearing a pink frock which accentuated her fine features, came in the room and shook hands with him.

"Welcome, Brother Cheltenham!" she said heartily.

Vane's brown eyes looked directly into hers.

"Thank you!" he said fervently. "I'm not only quite happy to meet you again, but exceptionally pleased to meet your charming parents!"

It was a lovely meal, delightfully served by the host. There was cream chicken with plenty of gravy; cottage cheese, the like of which he had never tasted before, and for dessert, delicious custard pie. He was very eager in his praise of the food.

During a lull in the conversation, Mr. Blake said:

"We enjoyed your sermon this morning, Brother Cheltenham."

Vane eyed his host earnestly.

"I'm glad you did, Brother Blake, for you see it was my first effort."

"Very commendable. There is plenty of work to be done here, the church is run down, but somehow I feel that you're just the man for the job. I formed that opinion the moment I laid eyes on you."

"Thanks," said Vane quickly. "I hope I won't be a disappointment."

Mr. Blake went on to tell the young pastor about the town and the people.

"There's an element in this town that simply finds fault with everything that's done," he said critically. "They refuse to accept public office themselves, but choose to stand by and criticise those who do serve."

Vance smiled and said: "Characteristic of most towns."

Mr. Blake's eyes were serious.

"It has always been my conviction that the Church, the Library, and the School are our most important institutions. When they function properly, our young people will get the proper start in life. Keep their hearts and minds trained on that which is good and the battle is won."

Vane's face lighted.

"You're quite right," he agreed. "There is nothing more pitiful than to see children brought up with no knowledge of Jesus."

Vane sensed what a great help the Blake family would be to him in his work.

"I see that you have two very remarkable children, Brother Blake," said Vane. "I can't help admiring them, their intelligence, their sense of humor. It's quite remarkable."

The grim face of Mr. Blake showed both pleasure and amusement.

"We just turned them loose out here in these hills and they grew up; they're native timber. A great deal of the credit, I presume, should go to their mother," he replied, casting a mischievous glance toward his wife.

Mollie's face beamed good naturedly.

"Mr. Blake would have it appear that he never takes credit for anything," she laughingly replied.

"I presume you are quite happy to have your daughter with you again?" said Vane.

"You can't know just how happy we are, Brother Cheltenham," said Mollie with enthusiasm. "I sometimes feel that it isn't worth while to have to give your children up for so many years in order that they may secure an education."

Vane, watching Dolores, sensed that it had been worth while. Her mind was quick and alert. He observed that she possessed the gift of making folks feel at home with her.

"I appreciate all that you've done, Mrs. Blake, as well as the wonderful hospitality that you've shown me," Vane said when leaving.

"Mother loves to do those things, Brother Cheltenham; she takes real delight in it," Dolores said. She followed him to the veranda, and asked him to call again.

"Just feel at liberty to come when you please," Mr. Blake called from the doorway.

"Thanks — thanks!" Vane returned.

The church was filled to capacity again that evening, and much interest manifested in the service. Vane took for his theme, "*Christianity In The Home.*" His words penetrated as he depicted what the American Home should be. "Not just a place to eat and sleep, but a sanctuary where love and peace abide. Let the spirit of Jesus be ever present there, and above all," he went on, "let it be a prayerful home! Get down on your knees and give thanks to God for his bountiful blessings!"

Mr. Blake walked home with the pastor after the services, and they discussed the history of the church in detail.

"You're young and strong, Brother Cheltenham, and can do great things for our people. They're a doubtful, suspicious lot, and will make every effort to find flaws in your character, but they can't help it; it's traditional. Underneath it all, they're a fine, warm-hearted people. First win their confidence and half the battle is won.

Alone in his study, Vane sat for a long time in deep reflection. He was thankful for the response he had received from his first sermons. The people had given him a warm greeting. The conversation with Mr. Blake had encouraged him greatly, and he felt that with the support of such people, he couldn't fail.

### 3

VANE threw himself into his work with characteristic vigor. Getting the Young Peoples' Organizations functioning again after they had become disorganized required considerable work and attention. The making up of a budget for the present year and getting the members to come forward with their pledges commanded his attention. He spent considerable time going over the church records, and he discovered that the membership was far below what it should be; it had dwindled slightly each year.

Mr. Blake accompanied him around town and introduced him to the business people. From his observation, Vane learned that they didn't hitch up well. They all had different ideas as to how a town should be run. They all appeared to be anxious for their children to have Christian training, but a great many of them apparently had no time for the church themselves. Sports, he learned, commanded quite a bit of their attention on the Sabbath.

"Strange how many people look with awe upon a minister of the gospel," Mr. Blake said in an undertone as they were leaving the garage. "A great many of them are shivering in their boots for fear that they'll be asked to turn loose a dollar for the church."

Vane smiled, but did not comment. He wasn't preaching for money. As long as he received sufficient to meet his expenses, he would go on, he reflected. He wanted to inspire, to help people find God.

He earnestly believed that children should be trained from the cradle up in the teachings of Christ. One thing which attracted his attention was the large number of young boys loafing in the streets on Sunday morning when they should have been in the church school. He spent the first few days calling at the homes of his members and getting acquainted. An affable fellow, he soon came to know every one in town; knew just who were church people and who were not. Gossip of one kind and another was whispered into his ears by certain members of his flock, but he paid no heed. He preferred to form his own opinions. He didn't want to lead just a few, he wanted to lead them all.

He was told by many just what he could expect.

"You'll never manage to make it go," Frank Devins, one of the bankers told him. "The people are too prejudiced."

Vane didn't swallow everything that was told him. He believed that there were many who could be urged to come and help out. The study of human nature was an interesting one, he thought. It was surprising how many excuses people could conjecture up for failure to help support the church.

He had no more than got his organization together when a panic struck the country bringing want and desolation along with it. There was much hardship and unemployment throughout the land, especially in the cities where there were so many idle men. A back-to-the-farm movement had started, the influx from the larger places brought many undesirable characters to the hill country; one Sid Parker in particular, who had come to Seven Corners, rented a building, and started a Recreational Resort. The people had been discussing ever since his arrival whether there was a need for such a place. The first real outburst of public opinion came when the young people began going there, often remaining until the wee hours of the morning. Men actually left their work and spent hours leisurely lounging around the place.

The populace looked on with awe at the various activities of Parker and his associates, never dreaming what proportions it would take, once it was firmly implanted into the life of the hillside town. Many, through curiosity, visited the place, while others shook their heads and kept away. Before many days a stir was caused by the report that it was a gambling place where liquor was served. The better class of the town led by the young pastor protested bitterly against such a place in Seven Corners.

Vane shuddered at the thought of what influence such a resort would have on the younger generation. There was a battle to be waged now, he reflected, and he wondered if he was big enough for the job. His determination to drive Parker from town if it were at all possible earned him a large measure of respect. The people began to sense his real worth and a few fought with him.

Vane chanced to be passing the resort one day when he was stopped by a small boy who was seated on the step with a rather dejected look on his face. He was dressed in a pair of faded overalls, and his stockingless feet showed through the holes of his ill-shaped shoes.

"Is my dad in there?" the lad asked.

Vane stopped short and eyed the lad in earnest appraisal. He observed that his face was splotched with mingled tears and dirt, but he liked the bright look in the eyes.

"Who is your father, my boy?" he queried.

"Lem Walker's my dad, sir. Mother wants him to come home. My sister is sick."

He looked so forlorn, so pitiful, Vane felt sorry for him. He grasped him by the hand and said:

"Let's go in and see if we can find him." He had been itching to see the inside of the place for several days, and this was his opportunity.

It was a large two-story building. On one side of the room, a bar ran the entire length of the building. A tall man with dark skin, smoldering black eyes and hair slightly gray at the temples, stood behind the bar. He greeted them in a loquacious manner. Van observed that his bushy black eyebrows and square smooth-shaven face bore a rather mean look, also that his affability savored of gushiness rather than sincerity. He disliked him readily. There was something in his face which branded him as a man wholly without character; a man interested only in his own welfare. Vane's eyes moved about the room. A few men were seated around on benches dozing. In the rear a man dressed in sheepskin coat and overalls was lying on the floor. He appeared to be asleep.

When the boy spied him, his face brightened.

"That's dad," he blurted, walking in his direction. He took hold of his arm and called, "Dad! Dad!" but got no response. The man was in a drunken stupor. The boy, pulling at his father's clothing, began to cry. "Come on home, Dad, sister's sick, and Mother needs you!"

The man raised himself on his elbow and stared toward his son through expressionless eyes.

"Get out!" he scowled.

Vane was deeply touched by the spectacle. Seeing that the man was too drunk to rise, he turned to the boy and said:

"Never mind, my boy, I'll go with you. Perhaps I can help your mother."

"Oh, if you only would, sir!" sobbed the lad, who had seated himself on one end of the bench, his whole frame heaving with emotion.

"What is your name, my boy?" queried Vane, when they were outside again.

"Johnny Walker, sir," replied the lad, and taking the pastor's hand, he led him to a small two-room house on the outskirts of the village. "Here's where we live."

It was a dilapidated place. Everything bore a look of neglect. Near the door a woman stood bending over a wash-tub.

"Mother!" said the boy, "dad's down at the Resort, drunk or something; I couldn't rouse him. This man came along; he says he'll help us."

Vane observed that she looked at him suddenly and searchingly. A loose old wrapper of dark material covered her slender undernourished body, her stringy reddish hair was combed back straight and done in a knot at the nape of the neck.

"Pardon me, madam, my name is Cheltenham. I'm the minister," he said politely. "I ran across your boy down the street and he told me that you were in trouble. Can I help you?" He was quick to detect the look of anguish in her haggard face.

She raised her eyes to his, her bosom heaving.

"The Lord knows we're a-needin' hit, sir!" She pointed toward a bed in the corner where a child about three years old lay writhing in pain. "She's just come out o' a convulsion, an' when she's sick I need Lem so bad. Sinct that Parker came t' town, I ain't been able to keep him t' home. He spends what money he gits thar, too, so the children an' I have to git 'long the best way we kin. Sometimes we don't see him fer two'r three days at a time. I don't know why I'm a-tellin' you this, sir, but yore face looks kind. I've been a-takin' in washin's an' buyin' what food we've had, but my strength is givin' way, an' I don't know how I kin keep hit up much longer."

Vane, watching the woman, sensed her great suffering. His heart went out to her in a flood of sympathy. She had given the best of her life for her husband; given her very blood to bestow upon him the title of father, and now when her strength had been sapped, her nerves at the breaking point,

he had failed her. He glanced about the room. He observed that the floors were bare, and with the exception of a bed, a four-holed cookstove, and a wooden table, there was scarcely any furniture in the room. A torn window blind shaded the window by the bed. What miserable surroundings for a mother rearing children, he reflected.

"Your task has surely been a hard one," he said with deep pity in his eyes. "Why didn't you let someone know of your plight?"

She looked at him with tired eyes and replied:

"I wanted to shield him s'long as I could, sir. He's their father, you know," pointing toward the children. "When a woman kin no longer hope thar's not much left to live fer. Seein' my children sick an' destitute has been the hardest thing to bear; seein' thar little bodies waste 'way from lack o' proper food, hit's been mighty hard, I'll tell you!"

A surge of pity swept over Vane. He laid a comforting hand on her shoulder and said:

"Have you a Bible?"

She made a helpless little gesture with her hand.

"No, sir, we've never been able to 'ford one. I did send the children to Sabbath school s'long as they had clothes to wear, but they ain't been a-goin' lately."

"We'll do what we can to help you, Mrs. Walker, and possibly we can help your husband to straighten up and find work."

"Oh, if you only would, sir!" she said appealingly. "Lem's a good man when he's sober. He'll work too when he gits a chanct. We've had sich a hard time o' hit. I'm a-feared that's what started him to drinkin'."

Vane observed that in spite of her husband's weakness, she still loved him, she still could plead for him.

"We'll see," he said, and going toward the bed, he placed his hand on the child's forehead.

"How are you feeling, dear?" he inquired.

The child rolled her eyes and turned her head.

"I'll send the doctor out, Mrs. Walker," said Vane, alarmed at the look in the child's face. "In the meantime, rest assured that we'll do everything we can for you."

"Thank you, sir, fer yore kindness," the woman replied, wiping her eyes with her apron.

As Vane was leaving, young Johnny stood at the gate holding a scrawny looking pup in his arms, its ribs plainly visible. He patted the dog's head affectionately.

"What's its name?" he inquired.

"Hamburger," replied the boy, hugging it close to his bosom.

Vane couldn't suppress a smile. The lad was interesting and intelligent, he thought. He felt dreadfully sorry for the family. A Bible verse he had read that morning flashed into his mind, "*The poor is hated even of his own neighbor; but the rich hath many friends.*" He wondered if there wasn't a great deal of truth in it.

Hurrying back to town, he spied William Blake standing in the door of the *Sentinel* office. He quickly told Blake of the conditions he had found at the Walker home.

"Too bad!" muttered Mr. Blake. "Sarah was as fine a girl as there was in the community, but I reckon she married the wrong man. Lem's always out of work. I'll speak to Mollie about it, she thinks a heap of Mrs. Walker."

"The poor woman's spirits are about gone," Vane said seriously. "I don't see how she has held up as well as she has. We must send the doctor out."

"Yes, I've never known Doc Atkinson to turn down a charity case yet. I've known him to drive ten miles through a blinding blizzard to see folks on a mercy call."

"He's laying up treasures in heaven, isn't he?" said Vane, slowly making his way to the doctor's office.

Old Doctor Atkinson was as fine a man as one could meet. From day to day he labored arduously among the people, relieving suffering, bolstering up their courage. He was a small gray-haired man, with a piercing blue eye that sort of looked through one. He was gentle and sympathetic with the people, often spending hours that were unnecessary at the bedside of a patient. When he lost a case, it hurt him almost as much as it did the bereaved relatives.

Vane waited only a few minutes when the little doctor appeared with his usual smile. He was wearing a faded black coat, and baggy light trousers which were so characteristic of him.

"Good-morning, Doctor," said Vane, and after greetings had been exchanged between them, he told him the object of his call.

The doctor scratched his head in earnest thought.

"I'm awfully sorry to hear this," he said sadly. "I've known Sarah since she was in pigtails. I'll run down and see her and the children, and no one don't need to worry about the bill."

Vane's heart leaped.

"That's a fine spirit, Doc. I fear that the child is dangerously ill, and unless something is done for her immediately, she's liable to die with one of those convulsions. The mother is almost sick herself. I was deeply touched by their suffering."

Dr. Atkinson patted the pastor on the shoulder and said:

"I'm truly glad that we have a pastor here that knows what's going on." Taking up his grip and hat, he led the way into the street. "I'll be seein' you," he added.

There's a real man for you, thought Vane.

## 4

JUST over the hill from the Blake place stood the home of Sylvester Andrews. It was one of the most modern in town; a two-story colonial with a pillared porch framing the front door, green vines climbing to the angled roof, and a velvet green lawn of blue grass descending gently down the slope of the hill.

Marian Andrews, clad in a pink morning wrapper, was transplanting flowers. Her daughter Eloise was helping her. Grandma Hildebrandt, a neighbor, had just sent over some asters.

Marian Andrews was a refined and cultured woman. She was tall, slightly gray, with friendly blue eyes that met folks more than half way. She was quiet, unostentatious, and everyone's first thought of her was that she was completely unconscious of her great charm. She had come west from Connecticut in her girlhood to teach in the rural schools of the hill country, and many of the sturdy men and women in that section could attribute their knowledge of the three R's to this noble woman. It was while teaching in Seven Corners, in later years, that she had met and fallen in love with Sylvester Andrews, then a struggling young bank clerk. Their marriage soon followed. Marian was so friendly and sweet, so much beloved, that most folks called her by her first name.

A woman with no regard for frivolities, her affections and interests were centered around her home, her family, her church.

While the Andrews family were comfortably fixed, and their home one of the most modern in town, there was no superior attitude toward their fellow townsmen. They mixed and mingled with all; sharing sorrows and joys. Public spirited people, they took an active interest in everything that was going on. They wanted to see the town progress. Marian, in her time, had held important offices in the Church and in the School. Human folks, they had come to realize that being a good neighbor, a good citizen, brought them more personal satisfaction than mere wealth. Their motives were misunderstood by many and appreciated by only a few. Marian was now in her late forties; her husband perhaps five years older. Their two daughters, Phyllis, twenty, and Eloise, eleven, were their chief delight. They tried to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

The Blake and Andrews families had long been friends and neighbors. Being blessed with a little more of the world's goods, and with the advantages of an education, they worked hard to blot out illiteracy in the hill country. Marian Andrews, along with Mollie Blake, had worked hard to keep the failing old church going. The two women had seen many pastors come and go with but little to show for their efforts, but they never lost courage.

There had always been more or less of a rivalry between Phyllis Andrews and Dolores Blake. Both handsome and accomplished girls, one naturally tried to keep pace with the other. When the Blake's sent Dolores to a college in Massachusetts, the Andrews family sent Phyllis to one in Connecticut. The two families, however, had much in common. They both strove to set high standards of Christian living. When any difficulty arose in church affairs, they invariably looked to each other for help.

Marian was interrupted by Mollie Blake making a morning call.

Phyllis, wearing a white pleated skirt with an orange sweater, was the first to greet her. "Good-morning, Mrs. Blake!"

"Upon my soul, Phyllis, if you don't get prettier every day!" said Mollie, holding her at arm's length in admiration. "You're three times better looking than you were when you went away to college!"

Phyllis' fair hair was waved in ringlets about her head. Her blue eyes sparkled as she said:

"Thank you, Mrs. Blake. How is Dolores?"

"She's all right, dear," she replied. "Why don't you run over?"

"I've been wanting to get over to see you," said Marian, ushering her to a seat on the veranda.

"How do you like our new pastor?" Mollie queried.

"Splendid, Mollie," replied her neighbor pleasantly. "I like his sermons. They impress me greatly. He'll be a great influence with our young people."

Mollie's smile widened.

"That's what I told Will this morning," she said enthusiastically. "I believe that we have a good minister now."

"Reverend Cheltenham is different all right," Marian said thoughtfully. "The whole town is talking about him. Some speak of him as a great genius, others brand him as a prig. Well, unless I'm mistaken, he'll soon prove himself."

The two women talked confidentially about church affairs, and made plans for the Fall meetings. Mollie told Marian about Sarah Walker's troubles, and the growing popularity of the Resort.

Marian shook her head in a troubled manner.

"They should put a stop to it at once," she said firmly. "Why, the very idea of allowing that man to come here and open up such a place!"

Mollie smiled. "Devins is at the back of it. He's rotten

clear to the core. The pastor is fighting hard to get the place closed, and I hope he succeeds."

When Mollie had gone, Marian set to work pulling weeds. She was fussy about her garden, and insisted upon doing all the work herself. She liked to see things grow. In early spring, she outlined her onion beds and the ridges for carrots and beets with great care. When the mellow earth began to put forth green grass, and the trees and shrubs gave promise of returning foliage and flower, she was elated. "There is more pleasure in making a garden than in anything that I've ever done," she often remarked to her husband.

"But, Marian, you work too much," he often protested.

"Too much, nothing! It's the best thing in the world for people when they know how to go at it," she would reply.

Inside the house, Phyllis was cleaning and putting the house in order. Stopping before the mirror, she put every curl in place. "You're just the same girl, Phyllis, as far as appearance goes," she said to herself. She had long been fond of young Tom Blake, but since her return from college, their relations hadn't been the same, and silently she hungered and longed for the companionship that had existed between them before she went away.

"Lovesick, aren't you?" jibed Eloise, who was watching her unobserved from the doorway.

Phyllis colored. "Maybe I am, and maybe I'm not," she replied crisply.

"I bet I know who it is that you're in love with," Eloise went on. "It's Tom Blake, isn't it?"

Phyllis looked provoked.

"Little girls shouldn't be so inquisitive," she returned.

"Then big girls shouldn't be so foolish as to fall in love, should they?" Eloise retorted.

"That's right, dear, they shouldn't, but come, the hillside yonder is covered with Rooster and Hen and probably some

daisies. Suppose we journey over?"

"Oh, boy!" Eloise exclaimed, donning her hat and taking hold of her sister's arm.

Marian watched her daughters leave with a look of pride. Gazing up the street, she spied her husband coming toward home, and she walked to meet him.

Clad in a gray suit with a hat to match, Sylvester Andrews' step was brisk. He was president of the First National Bank, a kindly man and a great humanitarian. For years, the hill people had looked to him for advice and sound business judgment. He served all alike, and was never too busy to go over their problems with them. He possessed a great understanding of human life, and to serve his town, his state, his nation, to the best of his ability, was his greatest desire. He knew every man in the county and what he was worth. In making loans, he didn't always consider the man's means and capacity to pay, but his honesty and integrity. He often told his wife that he found his greatest pleasure in helping an honest man who needed it.

"This seems like old times, Marian!" he said affectionately, giving her hand a tight squeeze.

She lifted her face to his with a shadow of apprehension in her eyes.

"I was just watching the girls, Sylvester, and thinking how happy they are. Do you suppose that anything will ever happen to spoil their happiness?"

"Why, of course not, dear," he said reprovingly, "Why do you have such thoughts?"

Marian's eyes were thoughtful.

"Oh, I'm just foolish, I guess, but I've had a sort of premonition. I fear that the dreadful place down the street means no good for our town."

"I quite agree with you there," he said companionably, "but we're going to get rid of that place." Placing his arm about her, he led the way into the house.

## 5

THE season ran on into Fall. Vane had entered upon his duties of reclaiming the old church with faith and courage. He found it uphill work, as the town needed something which even the best families didn't know how to give. The majority of the people had lived there always, and while they were enlightened, they were not in the real current of progress. He strode hard to create high ideals of civic life, and to raise the standard of education and ethics. He was misunderstood at first, especially by the unlearned, who looked upon him as a dude preacher with new-fangled notions regarding religion. He urged young and old to abandon sin and to live a life pleasing in the sight of God and this they wished to evade. It would mean a limitation of their freedom and reckless living.

Dolores Blake became a great help to the pastor in the Church School. She had taken a class of high school girls and had worked up considerable interest. Vane learned to respect and to admire her. If he had never met Maxine, it would have been easy to fall in love with her, he reflected. He was now firmly established at the Moss residence. Mrs. Moss treated him just like one of the family, and was proving to be one of his best workers in the church. Elva, the daughter, while very mischievous, possessed a strong character. She never failed attending the Church School.

Trouble broke out frequently in the neighborhood of the Resort which had to be quelled by the Law Enforcement

Officers. The people looked on in amazement, but did nothing to stop Parker. Vane counldn't help wondering what would be the end of it all. He knew that many of his members were frequenting the place instead of attending Services.

He labored indefatigably to keep interest alive. He had established a Men's Bible Class, but only a few of the older men attended. Those who were rearing children were the ones he wanted most to reach. They would promise to come, but when the Sabbath came, failed to put in an appearance. This was discouraging. He had been in Seven Corners going on six months now, and those who had received him so kindly at first began to appear indifferent. Now was the big moment, he reflected. Unless he could awaken them to their responsibility, he'd soon be going the way of his predecessors. He observed that fifty per cent of his people had no mind of their own, but depended upon someone else to do their thinking for them. He must teach them to think for themselves, he decided.

He observed that many old grudges and prejudices of years standing existed among his congregation, and he tried hard to weed them out and bring about an understanding between all factions. He warned his congregation from the pulpit of the danger that lurked in town for the young people, and urged them to use every means in their power to help him whip the forces of evil.

Before many weeks passed, he found himself preaching to slim crowds, and he decided that he would look into the matter. His attention had been called to the fact that since the day that he had preached his first sermon, Ezra Doolittle and his family hadn't been to church. He must call and determine the reason for this.

The Doolittles lived in an old weather-beaten house adjoining Ezra's blacksmith shop.

Small, neat, and buxom Mrs. Doolittle met him at the door, her soft gray hair smoothly parted in the middle, her spectacles down on her nose. She was wearing a plain black dress of cotton material and a white bibbed apron.

"Well, well, come in!" she invited; then in the next breath, as she stepped into the house, she plucked at his sleeve and whispered: "Better let me go first. Ezra's not himself to-day."

He followed the woman to the rear of the house, where Ezra sat slumped in a rocking chair by the fire.

"Ezra!" his wife called. "The pastor is hyear." She looked around the room and made a despairing effort to tidy up by picking up bits of cloth and paper that littered the floor. She whisked chairs into place with marvelous dexterity, eyeing the pastor all the while. "I might have known company war a-comin' when I dropped that knife this mornin'," she added.

Ezra, clad in a frayed old black coat and a pair of blue denim trousers, stared at the pastor in surprise. He was a small man with a bald head, a heavy growth of beard, and a pair of blue eyes that danced about.

"How-do-you-do, Ezra," said Vane, chilled somewhat by the seeming indifference of the little eccentric.

Ezra opened his mouth and gawked, showing his discolored teeth.

"Howd'y," he finally replied sullenly, without offering his hand.

Evangeline, the daughter, plump, rosy and fourteen, with brown hair brushed back from her forehead, warm blue eyes, and a rather wide mouth, was seated by the window engaged with some embroidery work. Wearing a fresh blue cotton dress, she made a wholesome domestic picture.

It was unspeakably gloomy inside the little low-ceilinged house, and Vane observed that the furnishings were of the plainest. After a few moments conversation, he remarked that he hadn't seen the family out to church lately.

"I ain't a-aimin' to go up on that hill to church very soon 'ither," he blurted, in a voice which was flat and metallic. His features reddened in uncontrollable irritation.

Vane observed that his host was extremely nervous and out of sorts.

"What's the trouble, Ezra?"

Ezra crossed his legs, and spat into a box of ashes that decorated the stove hearth.

"Wal, s'long as old Jedge Welborn's a-going' up thar to church, I ain't a-goin', that's all! He's double-crossed every man in the country, an' uses the church fer a cloak. If you don't b'lieve hit inquire 'round an' you'll find hit's the truth." His nervous fingers beat a tattoo on the arm of the chair. "An' while we're talkin', I might as well tell you that no pastor lasts long here unless the jedge approves o' him. He either rules or ruins."

Mrs. Doolittle, who had come to humor her husband's whimsicalities, slapped him on the shoulder playfully.

"Ezra, you mustn't talk 'bout folks like that!" she said reprovingly.

Vane's eyes probed those of his host.

"Even though what you say may be true, Ezra, God doesn't hold us responsible for the sins of others. I see no reason why the fact that you dislike this man should keep you and your family away from church."

Mrs. Doolittle edged her chair over closer to the pastor and said in an undertone.

"That's what I've been a-tellin' him fer years, sir, but hit ain't a-doin' me a bit o' good. Every new preacher that comes here hit's jest the same; he forms opinions quickly. He's prejudiced an' sot in his ways the worst o' anyone that you ever saw, an' nothin' kin change him. He drives me 'most to distraction at times the ways he acts, with Angeline a-cryin' to go 'long with the rest."

Ezra looked coldly at his wife, and spoke with a strange note of authority:

"Wal, I ain't a-carin' 'bout bein' 'round 'em kind o' people, 'sides hit ain't allus the one that goes to church that gits the furthest. I been 'round hyear nigh onto fifty years, young feller, an' I orter know what I'm a-talkin' 'bout."

"Wal, Father, you don't need to explode!" his daughter admonished with a meaningful look.

"Take keer, Angeline, how you speak to yore father!" her mother said reprovingly.

The child lifted her head arrogantly and said:

"Wal, Eloise Andrews an' Hulda Phillips, an' all the other girls in my grade go to church. I don't see why I can't be a-goin' too."

Ezra adjusted his glasses and eyed his daughter a trifle resentfully.

"I reckon thar's a heap o' 'em a-goin' up thar to church that don't know what they're a-goin' fer," he grimaced, his eyes fastened accusingly on his wife.

Mrs. Doolittle's chin went up.

"That's no reason why the rest o' us should lose faith," she remonstrated.

Ezra favored his wife with one of his piercing looks.

"I'm a believer in Christ all right, an' true religion, but I'll be hanged ef'n I've got any use fer this poppycock!" He spoke coldly with a tinge of sharpness.

Vane could see that his host possessed considerable talent for provoking controversy, and that his every thought emanated from impulses. He felt dreadfully sorry for the man. He could see that his mentality was warped, his judgment poor. His wife, he observed, was a good woman, and never spoke disparagingly of anyone. He wanted to read a chapter in the Bible and have prayer, but Ezra's garrulous tongue left very few openings. His mind was filled with hatred and malice

toward his fellowmen. Realizing that further talk would avail nothing, Vane rose to leave, expressing the hope that the family would try to go to church the following Sunday. Ezra hurled some sort of invective at the judge as he was leaving the room.

Mrs. Doolittle followed him to the door and said:

"I allus went to church reg'lar when I war a girl. My father and mother war deeply religious. We allus went on Sunday twice an' sometimes three times, an' in a spring wagon at that. Father would rather have taken a lickin' than to have missed church. But law me, since I married Ezra, I jest can't git him to go. He'll go a time'r two till he gits prejudiced 'gin some one, then he stops."

Vane's sympathy's went out to the woman. He could see that she lived in constant fear of upsetting her husband's equanimity. She had humored him so long that she no longer possessed an individuality of her own. Just why a man should allow himself to acquire such qualities as stubbornness and squeamishness was beyond him. Even the daughter's personality had been quashed, her happiness blighted, by her father's crankiness and prejudice.

"Do come ag'in, Brother Cheltenham," she said. "Don't mind Ezra, he's not quite himself to-day. He can't stand to hyear the judge's name mentioned without going off into thunderous blasphemy. Those two men have hated each other fer ages."

Vane thanked her for her hospitality, and made her promise that she would come to church whether her husband came or not. His smile had faded into an expression of fixed sadness. He felt dreadfully sorry for the family. Returning, he traversed the business section of the town, and stopped at the postoffice for his mail. A long letter from Maxine set his mind rambling, so he decided to go for a walk. He followed the

road that led out of town toward the creek, where he had sometimes gone in summer when the perch were biting.

'Twas Indian Summer, and beneath the oak and blackjack trees the ground was golden with newly-fallen leaves. The hillsides were lined with scarlet sumacs, blending through duller tones to the richness of the cottonwoods and the dark green of the cedars. Gazing upon the mass of beauty which God had created, he wondered how there could be so much sorrow and misunderstanding in the world. If people could only be made to see the beauty before their eyes, their hearts would be softened, he reflected. It seemed to him that God had placed so much of himself here on earth for people to enjoy, yet they went about pursuing worldly and material things; their eyes closed, seeing nothing, slaves to their habits and customs, too stubborn to change. It was small wonder that there should be sorrow and unrest in the world, he thought. His mind went back to the home he had just left a few moments before, the father's mind poisoned with hate, while God's love was so abundant, so ready to heal the wound in his heart if he would only surrender himself to His will.

The wooing autumn day caught him in its spell, and he soon forgot Ezra's unpleasantness. As he neared the creek, he entered a thicket of alder and young birch willows which were a blaze of autumn colors, and hearing voices, he stopped for a moment to listen. Two men, he observed, seated upon the bank of the stream, appeared to be in a strong argument over something.

"I'm through with you, Jim Cullimor!" said a rough voice. "I've been a-peddlin' this mash fer you fer sometime now an' you've been a-holdin' out on me!"

Vane caught a good glimpse of the men through the clearing. They each wore overalls, sheepskin coats, and carried a heavy growth of beard. They had a jug between them from which they drank frequently. Not wishing to be an

eavesdropper, he was preparing to leave when their voices grew louder. The argument soon developed into a violent quarrel. Soon, the two men rose to their feet, tottered, and began to fight. The larger of the two struck at the other one and sent him sprawling into the creek.

Vane hastily sprang through the brush and reached the creek just in time. The man was struggling in the water, too helpless to swim. He dashed into the water with but little hesitancy, and soon had the man on the bank.

"Why didn't you let him drown? He's not wuh savin', I don't reckon," laughed the other man, sneaking off into the brush.

Vane was dripping wet to the waist, but he worked with the man until he came to himself. He was dark and slender, with a swarthy skin and a black moustache; his gray eyes were almost expressionless.

"What is your name?" Vane inquired.

The man, wet to the skin, fumbled for an answer.

"Tim Logan, sir. That feller what jest left is Jim Cullimor', he's got a still down the crick."

"It's a mighty good thing that I happened along, my friend, or you'd have been drowned," said Vane, removing his trousers and socks and placing them on a bush to dry.

Logan belched loudly.

"You're right, sir. I've been a-tryin' to break off with Cullimor' fer sometime, that's what caused the trouble to-day. I'm much obleegeed to you fer what you've done fer me."

Vane eyed the man pitifully.

"My name is Cheltenham. I am the minister. I feel that God sent me down here on purpose this afternoon to save you from drowning. I trust that this will be a lesson to you."

Logan eyed the pastor sheepishly.

"Deed hit will, sir. I've got a wife an' two kids at home that'll be mighty glad that you happened 'long. If I kin ever he'p you in any way, I'll shore do hit."

"A wife and children," Vane mumbled, wondering what they must think of a father who was engaged in such a business. Then, with a touch of pity, he added: "Thanks, my good man, but if you'll just straighten up and find an honest job, I'll feel well repaid for my trouble. You're not an old man — you still have a chance to make something of yourself."

Logan grinned.

"So you're a preacher, air ye?"

"Yes, sir."

"I've never hearn one talk jest like you afore. You 'most make a feller ashamed o' hisse'f. Most preachers that we've had hyear don't pay no 'tention to the likes o' me."

"A minister's duty is to help people; to train them in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Not just a privileged few, but all people. Whatever possessed you to throw in with this man Cullimor?" Vane asked.

"Hard times, I reckon, I dunno what else," the man replied with averted eyes. "A man's got to make a livin' fer his family somehow."

"There are much better ways than that," Vane said in a didactic manner. "If you're not careful you'll find yourself behind prison bars, then what would your family do? Don't you think that if we do what is right and endeavor to make an honest living that God will look after us?" He pointed toward the hillsides lined with gold and brown and yellow, and added: "Observe the beauty that He has put before us. If we but avail ourselves of His love, He will send forth an abundant harvest."

"I reckon you know what you're talkin' 'bout," said the man, hanging his head. After a moment, he raised his eyes

and added: "I reckon I'll be a-goin', sir. I hope to meet you ag'in sometime."

The shadows of the big cottonwoods were now stretching halfway across the meadows where the cows lounged lazily chewing their cuds.

"Well, well," thought Vane. "I'm going to have more trouble here than I had anticipated."

From that day on, he strove ever more ardently to preach a saving Christ for lost and drifting souls.

## 6

SINCE his graduation from high school Tom Blake had been assisting his father on *The Sentinel*, Seven Corner's weekly newspaper.

Tom had taken some correspondence courses in journalism and advertising, and he began to see the possibilities of a better and brighter future for the paper; a larger circulation and a wider sphere of influence.

However, he felt the need of some additional training in a large newspaper office. And so, one day he approached his father on the matter.

"I should like to go to New York, Dad, and work on one of those large dailies for a while. With all respect for the good work you have done in *The Sentinel*, I believe in the future there is a possibility for a larger field of influence."

"This is somewhat of a surprise, son. I thought you were anchored here for life."

"I like it here, Dad, but I realize that I shall never be a worthy successor to you unless I receive as good a training as there is to be had. The times demand this of any young man."

"That's right, son, you wouldn't want to edit a small-town newspaper all your life, would you? The world is large, and I presume that there are many opportunities awaiting the youth who has the courage to get out and dig. I'll not stand in your way, Tom."

Mollie, seated by the window sewing, had been quietly taking in the conversation. Dolores was seated in an armchair, half dozing, with a book in her lap, lulled by the warmth of the comfortable room.

"How will we ever do without him, Will?" Mollie said, greatly perturbed. "It has been such a pleasure to have them both at home."

"I must get out in the world, Mother, where men are doing things."

Mollie's face saddened, and she made her stitches rapidly, nervously.

"I guess I'm responsible for this, Tom. I've preached it to you ever since you were a child," she said tearfully.

"Why all the sudden change in plans, Tom?" Dolores interposed. "Genius cropping out?"

"Call it what you like, Sis. My mind is made up." He took a pencil from his pocket and calculated his savings with lightning-like rapidity. "I have enough saved, Dad, to pay my expenses for the first few weeks," he added.

"It is more than we can expect, Tom, to have you with us always," his father said. "You're entitled to your chance, therefore I'll write Uncle Wilbur at once and ask him to find a place for you."

Tom leaped to his feet, and threw his arms around his mother's neck impulsively.

"Oh, I'm so happy, so thankful for the fine and intelligent parents that I have! I shall make you proud of me!"

"I'm that already," his mother said quickly. "I wouldn't have you change for the world."

"There is one thing that I want you to bear in mind," his father said. "If you do go, live a good, clean life while you're away, make good use of your time, and improve yourself in every way you can."

"And be ever-mindful of our family circle, and the vacant space that you've left behind," his mother chimed in.

Tom eyed his parents with a rapt look.

"You're a fine mother, the best one a guy ever had. And you, Dad, why, you're a brick!" he said rapturously.

When an idea came into Tom's head, he encouraged it feverishly until it became a reality. A week later he received a telegram from Wilbur Blake in New York telling him that he had found a place for him on the *New York Times*. He hurried over to the Andrews place to tell Phyllis the good news.

She greeted him effusively, and ushered him into the living room.

Tom plumped himself down unceremoniously beside her on the davenport, his eyes fixed on her face.

"What's the matter with you, Tom? Why that business-like air?"

Tom gave her arm a tight squeeze and said:

"Come out for a ride, Phyllis, I have oodles to tell you, and I can talk better out in the open." His voice was urgent.

Her clear blue eyes met his challengingly.

"Well, if it will make you any happier—" she said, smiling, and going for a wrap.

The road led out through the hills, and they passed many running streams sparkling in the sunlight.

"Isn't this glorious, Phyl?" he exclaimed. "You know, I've always had an urge to travel, to see places, to rough it for a while."

She eyed him with rapture.

"Oh, I never knew that before!" she said in a surprised manner. "I thought that you were as settled as the Rock of Gibraltar. Why don't you go out west to the desert country, get you a burro and ride about the country in search of gold? Thrilling, eh?" Amusement glinted in her eyes.

"Oh, boy, wouldn't that be the life?" he flung at her teasingly. "Well, really, Phyl, I don't feel that I'm contributing much to the world here in Seven Corners."

She laughed then said soberly.

"Why, Tom, isn't there plenty of useful things you might be doing?"

Tom eyed her curiously for a long moment and said:

"Yes, I presume so, but I don't seem to be content doing my little bit here. I want to broaden out, expand, see?"

She took a deep breath and said:

"Tom Blake, I'm learning things about you that I never knew before!"

"Really, Phyl, I don't believe that you think I have any ambition at all."

She laughed, her face radiant with admiration and love.

"Really, Tom, I hadn't thought much about it. I've just taken you for granted, I suppose. Of course, I think that you have ambition."

He flushed, a slow, happy grin on his face. His tone changed from banter to seriousness.

"Listen, I'm going to New York to learn the newspaper business in earnest," he said, a ring of quiet exultation in his voice. "Will you miss me?"

Her eyes widened with interest.

"Oh, Tom, not really?" she exclaimed aghast.

He nodded. He had stopped the car, and from an eminence they could look down into a deep valley below.

Phyllis had clasped her hands together, and the face that she turned to him was rapt.

"Oh, I am so glad! Of course I shall miss you, but I think that you're doing the right thing. You must make a place for yourself in the world."

His face came close to hers.

"Phyl, it's great to feel important at twenty; to feel equal to taking responsibility! I guess I've been a dunce not to see it before, but everyone has been pointing their finger at me and saying that I didn't have ambition enough to get out in the world and learn something. I've been self-centered enough to feel that I was indispensable to everybody's happiness around here, but I've waked up at last. The truth of the mat-

ter is, I've just dreaded leaving you, Phyl!"

She looked straight into his eyes, face and eyes glowing.

"Me, Tom?" she gasped.

"Yes, you!" he said, placing a hand on her arm. "I don't suppose that you ever suspicioned that I was in love with you?"

"Tom!" she gasped in surprise. "You're so different. I've never seen you in this mood before."

He straightened up, rumpling the dark hair back from his handsome forehead.

"Pshaw, I don't know how to tell you just how I feel," he said, his eyes flashing. "On my way over here I thought of a hundred things that I wanted to say to you, but you simply make me forget everything!"

"Oh, now, I wouldn't say that!" she said reprovingly. "Seven Corners will be dead without you, Tom!"

"And you'll miss me a lot, eh?" he asked, edging closer. How about it?"

She laughed.

"I'm afraid that I'll miss you terribly, Tom," she said seriously, her eyes averted.

"That's what I wanted to hear you say!" he said earnestly. "If I ever get anywhere in life, it will be because of you, Phyl—your sweet nature inspiring me!"

"I never knew that you felt like this. Why didn't you tell me before?" she said innocently.

"It's been on the end of my tongue many times," he confessed, "but you see, I'm rather shy. I didn't know how you would feel about it."

He told her all about his plans to go East, and how he hoped to advance himself in the newspaper world.

"When will you be leaving, Tom?" she asked.

"Next week perhaps. Say, do you realize that it will be a long time before I will see you again?"

Her face showed deep interest.

"It won't seem long, Tom, you'll be so busy. You see, while you're working so hard, I, too, can be doing something in the way of self-improvement. But suppose—suppose, Tom, that when you get out in the world, you should meet someone else whom you cared for?"

His grin widened.

"Pshaw! You know I never could care for any girl but you, Phyl!" tenderly.

"When you get to New York you will meet girls who surpass me in many ways," she said gravely.

"Well, I guess not," he said, pressing her arm tight. "You're a real honest-to-goodness girl! The one that I crave above all others. Honest, Phyl, I've never given any other girl a serious thought!"

"You had quite a case with Cora Brown in your Sophomore year," she said accusingly. "You haven't forgotten that."

"Puppy love! That's all that was," he explained.

"When did this sudden spurt of ambition strike you, Tom?"

"It's been working on me for quite a while, I'm afraid. Gee, but a year's a long time to go without seeing you!"

"The time will soon pass, Tom," she said encouragingly. "You will find your work so interesting—so thrilling, the days will go by so fast you'll scarcely know where they have gone."

His face was serious.

"Why didn't I think of this when I finished high school? I'd have served my apprenticeship by this time."

"You were waiting for the urge, Tom. That comes spontaneously."

It was almost dark when they reached home. They had stayed to watch the sun set behind the hills. It had been an important day in Tom's life. He had made some great decisions.

The following week he left for New York.

SWEEEPING changes were taking place in Seven Corners. All seven roads leading into the place brought people to the resort.

When night came, bright lights glared from the resort, and inside the building was much activity.

Vane waited anxiously for developments. He could see that the place was greatly interfering with his work in the church. His congregation had dwindled, his people were fast losing interest, their minds centered on worldly things. He was meeting with the same trouble his predecessors had encountered, only much worse. He had Parker to contend with. He was resolved to stay with it, though. He believed that the power of God would help him to win out. That the entire city government needed a weeding and cleaning was quite obvious. Strange, he thought, how many people there are in the world who will follow any kind of leader. Parker, he observed, was not only holding his own, he was expanding. He was too wise for the officers. When one happened to drop in, he was escorted through the place and given to understand that nothing was taking place there that was against the law. Vane knew that public opinion was divided on the question as to whether the place should be allowed to remain open or closed. Devins and Welborn, he knew, favored Parker, and the judge's influence went a long ways. How a man reputed to be one of the most substantial pillars in the church could take such a stand was more than he could understand.

As the days sped by, and the people saw how Parker disregarded the law and operated his place to suit himself, they be-

came alarmed. Vane, since the day that he had entered the resort with the Walker lad, made up his mind that some action must be taken to curb the man's activities. Slowly and deliberately he went about it, dropping a word here and there, and calling particular attention to any move made by Parker. Soon, an opposition party sprang up. A number of the business men got their heads together and decided to look into the matter. They were sure that unlawful things were taking place at the resort, but could obtain no proof. A close watch was being kept on the place. With the arrival in town of so many rough looking characters, it was feared that the gangster spirit was penetrating the hill country.

Mayor Welborn, acting upon the advice of his fellow townsmen, called a meeting at the Town Hall to organize a Citizens' League. Innumerable complaints had been pouring into the mayor's office regarding activities at the resort.

Vane hoped that much good would spring from the meeting. He arrived at the hall early that evening, and watched the men file into the room with great interest. Eben Kyle, a small scholarly looking little man with gray hair and a high forehead, came first, followed by Mayor Welborn, swinging his long arms. Will Blake, with a brisk step, carrying his hat in his hand, was the next. Syvester Andrews, well poised and smiling, came in with Jim Young. After that they came in twos and threes and the room hummed with conversation. The turnout exceeded Vane's expectations.

Mayor Welborn rose to his feet to call the meeting to order. He was an ex-judge and lawyer, but a poor orator. He was slightly bald, with a high slick forehead, a large square statesman's face, and a long protruding nose that was as red as a May cherry. The judge, a title bestowed upon him by his fellow citizens, was a man of considerable influence. He was a jolly good fellow at heart, could tell famous yarns, but he was rather lax in certain principles.

Adjusting his glasses, the mayor read to them the various complaints that he had received by mail, and related orally the gossip that he had heard regarding the resort. The church element, especially, was objecting to such a place being operated within a stone's throw of the church.

Diminutive Doctor Atkinson, his grim old face bearing an earnest look, was the first to speak.

"It might be well for the citizens of this town to band together and let Parker know that there is no need here for the type of business that he conducts, and that his presence in town is undesirable."

Frank Devins, president of the Farmers National Bank, fidgeted nervously.

The judge's eyes lifted and something like a wry smile touched his lips. He cleared his throat and said:

"To take such action, Doc, would be interfering with the man's personal liberty, and is against the Constitution of the United States."

"Judge Welborn," said Sylvester Andrews, rising to his feet quickly, his chin set in a determined line that was only too well known to his associates. "I trust that this isn't organized vice that we have here with political backing?"

Before the judge could reply, Doctor Atkinson was on his feet again.

"The following that Parker has is sufficient evidence of his character," he said firmly. "Have you observed the number of rough looking characters who have made their appearance in town since his arrival? Slick tongued men who roam our streets at night, their minds bent on evil! If this resort is allowed to operate here under cover of the law, it will develop into proportions that we cannot visualize. In my opinion, action should be taken at once to padlock the place!"

There was a roar of applause.

"I'm of the same opinion," spoke up Will Blake, who until now had kept silent. "Parker has no interest in our town other than to fatten his own wallet."

"Well, I don't know about that," said the judge with a metallic note in his voice. He paused, stiffened himself a little, and added: "I don't like to convict a man until I know that he's guilty."

"If our young people must have recreation, let it be something that will build them up," the doctor retorted.

There followed a pause in which no one spoke, then dynamic Frank Devins rose to address the meeting. Tall, dark, masculine looking, his mouth was thin and secretive. Every line of his dark, arrogant face suggested power. He could talk well, even brilliantly when the occasion demanded, and he usually succeeded in swinging others to his point of view. With but few exceptions, he was generally disliked by his fellow citizens. He carried himself with the air of a celebrity, and he was a man most difficult to understand by the common people. Many who had obtained loans from his bank made pretense of friendship, and those who found themselves in his clutches, through fear, obeyed him. He had managed in some way to get on the City Council, much to the dissatisfaction of many of the citizens.

The eyes of the whole house were focused upon him, obviously wondering what he was going to say. In his look, there were something like contempt.

"Listen, men!" he began, obviously trying to make his voice sound casual. "Are the charges against this man Parker real or imaginary? Did this meeting develop from a high motive or as the result of back-fence gossip? I've been in the resort a number of times and I saw nothing unlawful taking place there. Personally, I'm glad that we have such a place in oper-

ation. Most towns have clubs where men gather for a bit of recreation. What's the harm in it, I'd like to know?"

His words fell like a thunderbolt. A half dozen men started to rise at once. Dr. Atkinson's blue eyes, under the sweep of gray, flashed fury. He jumped to his feet, and stood staring at Devins with an expression of supreme contempt on his face.

"What's the good in it, Devins, tell us that?" he said snapishly.

The stern lines deepened around Devins' lips. With a snort of bitter disgust, he said:

"Well, Doctor, man, by nature, is a sociable creature. The natural thing is to want to gather evenings to talk over the problems of the day and play a sociable game of cards." For a moment his throat worked convulsively, then he resumed: "I think you men get my meaning." He didn't appear to be able to keep the hostility from his voice.

A solemn glance passed around the room. Sylvester Andrews leaned back in his chair, cleared his throat and frowned. Eben Kyle, thus far an unobtrusive spectator, moved up and seated himself by Will Blake. The men obviously hid their dismay behind cold smiles.

Finally Andrews rose to his feet and stood regarding Devins with cool, reprobating eyes.

"Your speech was well-rendered, Devins, but I'm not convinced. I want to suggest that the mayor call a meeting of the city council to further discuss this subject."

Devins winced, his eyes flashed fire, and he shot Andrews a hate-filled look.

"I feel that you gentlemen have been misinformed in regard to the resort," he said with a steely note in his voice. "As far as I can see, Parker pays his rent, minds his own business, and has the same privilege that the rest of us have to earn a livelihood. To use force to put him out of business wouldn't be right."

The judge, weakly, retorted: "He must stay within the law!"

Vane watched this dramatic show disdainfully. Devins' words just simply burned him up. How a man of his standing could get up and defend such an evil practice was beyond all reason. He wasn't very well acquainted with the man, but he quickly sensed that he had no regard for human welfare. He knew that what the world needed today was men of strong character like Andrews and Blake and the doctor; men who loved their town and were interested in the growth and development of their young people. He was glad that they were not all like Devins. He had been hoping that a resolution would be made that very evening to put Parker out of business.

There was a moment of dramatic silence. Devins cast a quick, speculative glance around the room, and with the fire of his indignation kindled, leaped to his feet and began to spout flaming disapproval of present-day customs and tendencies.

"I think it's high time that we abandon some of our old, time-worn customs and go in for something new. This town's in a rut. What we need here is an active Chamber of Commerce. We must try and attract new enterprises. Only in this way can we go forward. I have recently been instrumental in bringing a new store to town which will enable us to widen our trade territory."

Andrews' face got very red and he said in husky anger:

"We can scarcely take care of those we have now, Devins. Expansion and new enterprises are all right providing there is a public demand for them, but what we're getting now is the overflow from other places. We must take care lest they crush and force our own people out of business."

Devins, his avaricious nature plainly visible, seemed to suppress the impatient retort on his lips.

Eben Kyle, long-time merchant of Seven Corners, popped up and said quickly:

"Since the coming of your new store, Devins, my business has dropped fifty percent. But to get back to the subject which we met here to discuss, I wish to say that I'm convinced from my observation that this man Parker has no regard for law and order."

Devins said with audacity: "Suppose you tell us just what you've observed, Mr. Kyle."

The men gazed with calm, steadfast faces at Eben.

"Brawling, carousing, drunkenness, is that sufficient?" Eben flamed.

Devins shifted his weight in his chair.

"The worst trouble in my opinion," spoke up Will Blake, "is the danger that lurks there for our young people. Then, there are men with families who'll spend their money there when it's needed at home. In this way women and children are made to suffer. I hope steps will be taken to close the place immediately."

"Before such action can be taken, you must have something on the man which you can prove," Devins said arrogantly. "You can't convict a man on mere supposition."

Vane felt that it was time for him to say a word. He was boiling inside. He made his way slowly to the front of the hall and stood gazing out over the crowd. The audience broke into applause. He bowed his head in grateful acknowledgment. In the state of mind that he was in, he knew that he was going to say things that wouldn't set well with some of his listeners, but he felt that he must speak his mind. As he began to talk, he forgot the fact that he was a minister of the Gospel, and let his words flow freely. He upbraided

Parker for his corrupt practices and condemned those who stood with him.

"I was very sorry to hear one of our most substantial citizens rise to his feet and defend a practice that is so rotten, so corrupt, that a continuance of it is unthinkable," he said.

Devins' eyes blazed as he stared at the pastor. Then, grabbing his hat, he marched angrily out of the room.

Devins' abrupt departure caused a furore among the crowd; they were all talking and whispering at once. Dr. Atkinson, with his chin in his hand, chuckled. The banker's action wasn't much of a surprise to Vane. He had expected it.

"I trust that you men will not be swayed by Devins' remarks," he said, when he had their attention once more. "A great many of you know better than I the character of the man. I shall pray most earnestly that he will be given the wisdom to see the danger in allowing such a place as Parker's Resort to keep open. It's true, without question, that young people must have some sort of recreation if they are to live happy, normal lives; and unless the church provides such recreation, they'll go elsewhere for it. I have in mind a plan to organize a Recreational Department in the church, and I hope to be able to secure your collaboration. Let's make our town a clean place in which to live; a place where our young people can thrive wholesomely and happily."

The men, one after another, voiced their approval of the plan.

"Your idea is a good one, Brother Cheltenham," said Will Blake. "I have always felt that there was a need for such a department, and I am happy that you are contemplating such a move."

"Let's not permit this meeting to be held, and forget tomorrow its object," Vane said in closing. "In the name of Jesus, I implore you to lend your efforts toward driving the

resort from our town before it has become so firmly rooted here that we will be helpless to act."

The crowd applauded uproariously.

Vane was greatly disappointed over the results of the meeting, but he was resolved to keep fighting until he had his enemies on the run.

## 8

ELVA MOSS, usually a happy and carefree girl, had been brought to tears by an unfortunate love affair. Steve Hilyard, with whom she was in love, had been forbidden to the house by her mother. The resort, by this time, had such a bad reputation that anyone who went near the place was branded as a drunkard and a gambler. Rumor had it that Steve spent a great deal of his time there, and that he had actually been seen intoxicated.

Elva's mother was furious when the rumors reached her ears. "Just to think, my Elva going with a drunkard! It's disgraceful!" she raved.

"I just can't believe the rumors, Mother. For all that we know, it may be just gossip. I feel that you've done wrong in turning Steve away from the house. We should stand by him, shield him from lying tongues," she said in a quiet tone of endurance.

The mother and daughter had always been companionable. The loss of the husband and father a few years back had strengthened the bond between them. At times, the widow found it difficult to meet her expenses. She took in lodgers and earned whatever she could in that way. She was ambitious for her daughter, and wanted her to have the things that other girls had.

Mrs. Moss shook her head doubtfully.

"Anyway, child, Steve has managed to get himself talked about, and you know what it means to have your name linked

with his. He'll have to walk straight before I can allow him to come here. I'm sorry, dear."

Elva's eyes suddenly grew dark with surprise and pain.

"One can't believe everything one hears, mother. I feel that you are unfair to Steve."

Mrs. Moss drew her chair up closer to her daughter and said: "It grieves me, dear, to see you in the grip of a love affair. You are so young. I've always wanted you to be happy, but a girl has to be very careful of her reputation nowadays. I feel that you should drop Steve until he straightens up."

Elva's slender little body stiffened with anger.

"Then I'll be doing him an injustice, mother. He's the best friend I've ever had. I don't see why it is that every time a girl starts going with a boy that some folks try to cause trouble between them!" she said spiritedly.

Mrs. Moss eyed her daughter apprehensively.

"You mustn't get so wrought up over it, dear. You must stop this affair before it goes any farther. If Steve doesn't care enough for you to take care of his reputation, he has no business coming here. You're all that I have, Elva, and it's just simply breaking my heart!" her voice broke as she uttered the last sentence.

Elva, obviously touched by her mother's grief, threw her arms about her.

"Don't worry about those old gossips, Mother. It isn't as bad as you think, I'm sure."

Mrs. Moss placed her hand on her daughter's head affectionately.

"I want your life to be happy, dear. You wouldn't want to marry a man who did not protect your honor."

Elva became once more a very pretty little girl, and quite submissive.

"It grieves me, Mother, to see you suffer for I know that you're the gentlest soul in all the world, but somehow I can't believe all these reports regarding Steven. The ghastly uncertainty of it is killing me! I do wish that you could understand my feelings toward him. To me, he's not the man that you believe him to be; he has shown me every consideration. Besides, I love him!"

Mrs. Moss sat for a few moments in a reflective mood.

"I can remember, dear, when young love gripped my own heart," she said pensively. "Your father was a gallant youth. I shall cherish his memory always. He was plenty good looking and attractive when he was young and full of spirit and vigor. But what I admired about him the most was his strength of character. He would never have done anything dishonorable; anything to cast a blot upon the good name of Moss. Right thinking and living was almost an obsession with him. I regret, Elva, that you've been deprived of his guidance. I can't believe that Steve really cares for you or he'd be more careful of his actions."

Elva, once her hair was arranged to suit her, with every curl in place, gave her mother her full attention.

"I wonder if this resort is as bad as rumor has it painted. There are a few people in the world who find something wrong with everything — even the church."

"Huh!" her mother ejaculated. "I've seen enough with my own eyes to convince me that it's a hell-hole! The people seem to have lost all power of reasoning. The mayor, instead of trying to close the place, actually upholds Parker. It's disgusting. There is never a week passes but what Will Blake gives the resort a rap in the pages of the *Sentinel*. I admire him for that. I'm afraid that Brother Cheltenham is going to get himself into trouble over the stand he's taking. He's determined that the place must be closed. Judge Welborn, you

know, has always run the church, but I never expected to see the day when he'd take sides with a man like Parker. He has changed considerably lately. I fear that he and the pastor are going to clash over the matter." She laid her mending aside, breathed a sigh of relief, and added: "That's done. I must get at my quilt tomorrow."

Elva's face was sad.

"Don't grieve any more, Mother. I promise you that I won't do anything disgraceful. I mean to have it out with Steve. Why, oh why, did they ever allow that man Parker to come here and open up such a place?"

Mrs. Moss folded her arms and replied: "I reckon they couldn't help themselves. Mr. Devins rented him the building, I understand."

Elva patted her mother's face affectionately.

"Well, we're not going to worry any more about it, today. Come, be your old self again!"

Elva's words brought a smile to her mother's worn face.

"Mothers just can't help being like they are, dear. You'll understand if you ever have children of your own."

The next few days Elva was especially kind and thoughtful of her mother, and did everything that she could to help her. One afternoon, left alone, she spasmodically determined her course of action. "I'll meet him tonight for the last time," she mused. "I'll find out for myself whether these things are true." That evening, pleading a headache, she ostensibly retired early. Her mother always read for an hour before retiring, and the pastor usually remained in his study working on his sermons. Reaching her room, Elva stared at herself in the mirror. "I look as if I were bent on committing a crime of some sort," she muttered to herself. She dressed for the street, and slipping down the back stairs, quietly left the house.

It was March, and a raw wind was blowing. Steve, clad in a brown overcoat with the collar snugly protecting his neck, met her at the corner.

"Hi, Elva, it seems a long time since I've seen you."

They walked down one of the quiet, residential streets.

"What's come over you?" he asked, giving her hand a tight squeeze. "You're as cold as an icicle."

"Oh, I don't know, Steve," she said wearily. "My heart is heavy this evening."

"How long is this going to keep up?" he asked.

"What, Steve?"

"These clandestine meetings."

"Oh," she said with seriousness. "That all depends upon you. They may culminate at any time as far as I am concerned."

"I'm sorry your mother has taken such a dislike to me. I always liked her! She always seemed like a mother to me."

"She thought well of you, too, Steve, at one time," she said curtly.

"I don't feel that I've done anything wrong," he said defensively. "Some one has been telling her things."

"It's true that you frequent the resort, isn't it?" she asked pointedly.

"I have been there a time or two," he said evasively, his eyes on the ground.

"Mother is greatly upset over the matter. Will you promise me that you won't go again?" Her tone was urgent.

"You're too exacting, Elva. There's no harm in going there, but I'll promise. . . . I'd do most anything to please you."

"All right, Steve, let's see if you can keep your promise."

She dismissed him early, telling him that she didn't feel well. She watched him make his way down the street. Once he was out of sight, she seated herself on the porch to wait. One hour — two hours flew by, and she put on an old coat

that was her mothers, placed a veil over her hat and face, and made her way toward town. . . . It was rather dark down in the neighborhood of the resort, although as she drew near the place, the lights from within the large building shed a ray of light in her pathway. Peering in at the window as she passed the tavern, she saw Steve standing inside. Not caring to be seen, she stepped into the first doorway and waited. Boisterous shouts and clouds of smoke came forth when someone opened the door. Inside the building, drunken men were roving about, unaware of their vulgarity. "What can be the attraction in that vile place?" she asked herself. She was on the verge of fleeing home when the door suddenly opened and Steve came out. He stopped, lit a cigarette with nervous movements of his hands, snapping the lighter shut with a click.

"Steve!" she called from the doorway. She put a hand to her heart as though to still its eager beating. "So this is the way you keep your promises!"

He turned and gazed at her. For a moment he appeared to be speechless, but came to himself immediately and moved toward her.

"My God, Elva, is it you?" he asked in a strained, uneven voice. "Why did you follow me?" For an instant he glared at her, his face white.

Her cheeks flamed, and with a despairing look she said: "Because I wanted to find out if I could trust you — wanted to see with my own eyes if all those things that people were saying about you were true. What attraction do you find in that place?" She had clasped her hands together, her face, upheld to his, was sorrowful and sad.

Savagely he bit through the end of his cigarette, tossing it into the street.

"Listen, Elva, I'm sorry if I've hurt you, for you mean more to me than anybody in the world!" he said tenderly, placing his hands on her trembling shoulders.

She pushed him aside and spoke tensely and harshly.

"Oh, fiddlesticks! If my love meant anything at all to you, you wouldn't go near such a place! And just think, all this time I have been defending you, refusing to believe the rumors!"

The chagrined Steve stood speechless, his face filled with amazement, doubt and pain. He flushed as her words penetrated.

"Is this such a terrible thing that I have done, Elva? Other men come here."

Anger glinted in her eyes.

"Gentlemen do not," she said with a petulant gesture. "All those drunks, I loathe them!" She looked into his eyes long and searchingly, as though reading his very soul.

He drew closer, but she waved him away with dismay.

"You've been drinking!" she flashed. Her eyes moved away from him as though the very sight of him hurt her.

The accusation infuriated him.

"Well, a man may as well live up to his reputation, I reckon," he said, rumpling his black hair with his hand. "I'm sorry that you came here. What would people say if they saw you down in this neighborhood?"

"Huh!" she ejaculated. "What would they think of you? I presume that you know the whole town's talking about you already. They even accuse you of being intoxicated."

Laying a hand on her arm, he said contritely.

"I can't help what they say, Elva. I never thought that you were a girl who would believe everything that she heard."

"One can't very well help believing when they see it with their own eyes, Steve," she retorted. Then, she took the ring that he had given her from her finger and forced it into his

hand. "This is no easy thing that I am doing, for you are the only man that I have ever loved, but I'm through with you until you can prove yourself to be a man! There are many useful things you might be doing with your time besides wasting it in such a place as this. Have you no ambition, no ideals?"

He seized her hands, clinging to them, kissing them avidly.  
"Forgive me, darling, if I've hurt you!"

She took advantage of the opportunity to speak her mind, and her words seemed to strike him dumb. He gazed at her in dismay and surprise.

"I feel that you are making too much out of this, Elva," he said penitently.

With hot tears coursing down her face, she said brokenly:

"I'm sorry, Steve, but those who frequent such a place as this can't keep company with me. My old mother is grieving herself sick over my affair with you, but she isn't going to grieve any more after to-night. Until you can build yourself up again in her opinion, do not attempt to see me! Good-night!" Hurriedly she skipped down the street in the direction of home.

In her hasty flight, she left him speechless. Suddenly, with a lump in his throat, he uttered a startled exclamation and rushed down the street after her.

"Elva!" he called. "Wait!" But she paid no heed.

Reaching home, Elva entered the house and closed the door behind her.

## 9

FOR forty years Eben Kyle had been in the general merchandising business in Seven Corners. Coming there from an isolated farm when the town was first laid out, he had played an important part in its development. His first place of business was a crude structure built from clapboards about twenty feet by ten, and it was the only building in the block at that time. His dealings in the early years were mostly in trade, and his stock had to be hauled in from the railroad in a spring wagon. He carried the farmers from year to year and even longer when there happened to be a crop failure. In the early days he had done a large business in groceries and dry goods. What money he had made in the lean years, he had put back into the business or spent toward civic enterprises.

Eben was a public spirited man. He wanted to see the town progress. He had made generous donations to the church and library, and was a great booster for better equipped schools. The streets had been improved, and bonds voted for this and that until taxes grew so high that he found it hard to break even. He had done a good business until the coming of the new store, Loomis Brothers, which had opened directly across the street. Now, when the people had cash to spend, they went to his competitor to buy. His business suffered. His trade consisted mostly of credit customers, who for years had depended upon him to carry them through financial hardships. None of the citizens, it seemed, stopped to think of the old merchant who had grown thin and gray in their service.

Elizabeth Kyle, Eben's wife, was a wiry little old woman with pale blue eyes and a sad countenance. Kindhearted and sympathetic, she worked among the poor and sick of the community, and before Doctor Atkinson came, she was often called upon to assist at the bedside of an expectant mother. She was always ready to drop whatever she was doing and rush to the aid of the suffering. Neither she nor Eben had ever considered the mere making of money of first importance. She often said that she would rather make a friend, any time, than a dollar.

Eben and his wife stood staring from their window toward the new store across the street. Both of their heads were as white as cotton lint. A cloud came over Eben's face, as he saw swarms of people, many of whom he recognized as his old customers, who many times had come to him with hard luck stories pleading for credit, going in and out the door.

"Strange how people take to something new, isn't it?" he muttered.

Elizabeth, staring fixedly at someone across the street, said: "That's just what I was thinking, Eben. Declare if that ain't Lina Williams, she hasn't been in here for ages.

Eben shook his head.

"No, Elizabeth, they don't seem to know where our store is any more." He bowed his head thoughtfully for a moment and added. "Well, I reckon they'll come back when they want credit."

Elizabeth Kyle frowned.

"Yes, that's just it," she nodded. "When their children were barefoot, their bodies undernourished, they came to you for credit — you never refused it. Now that they're on their feet again, they seem to have forgotten. Well, that's the way of the world, I reckon. Not much appreciation left." There was a trace of anguish in her voice.

"Even the members of our church are taking their business to our competitor," Eben averred.

"Such ingratitude hurts, Eben. I can't help feeling resentful toward them for it. We've always been idealists, I presume, and as such are doomed to a life of disappointment and misery."

Eben folded his arms, turned to his wife and said earnestly: "I don't know whether you've noticed it or not, Elizabeth, but it appears to me that people have changed since the war. All the old loyalties which bound folks together have been forgotten, and it's getting to be every fellow for himself. It's hard for people like you and me to get used to the new order."

His wife shook her head.  
"The law of self-preservation is being lived up to more than any of the others nowadays," she averred.

"Well," said Eben, after a moment of meditation, "our business is practically at a standstill. We have over three thousand dollars out on the books and the creditors have served notice. We must raise at least two thousand cash or close our doors. There's an accumulation of old goods on the shelves that'll have to move."

Elizabeth Kyle leaned against the counter and said:  
"I knew this was coming, Eben. We've been so busy helping others, we have failed to make provision for ourselves. I don't like to be critical, but you'll have to admit that you've always been too generous."

While Eben was thinking up an answer for his wife, Jim Smith, a colored man, yelled from the doorway:

"Any left-ovahs, Mr. Kyle?"  
For years, Eben had given the perishable left-overs from his store to the destitute.

"There's a head of cabbage back there, Jim, that you can take along," Eben replied.

"Thank you, Mr. Kyle — thank you, sir," replied Smith, helping himself. He had a large family of children and had been out of employment for some time.

Eben's present store occupied a single large room perhaps forty feet wide by seventy feet long. At one side, glass showcases ran the length of the room, containing a variety of articles, which he had carried in stock for years.

When Frank Devins first came to town, fresh from Chicago, he had made a careful survey of the town. On a visit to Eben's store, he had eyed the shelves and showcases with appraisal, informing the gray-haired storekeeper that his stocks and methods were too antiquated. He urged him to modernize.

"You know the old saying, Devins," Eben had replied. "You can't teach an old dog new tricks."

A week passed, and Eben and his wife were preparing to put on a large removal sale to raise two thousand dollars. They inventoried the stock, and worked assiduously tagging and marking goods down below cost. They had a large number of sale bills printed and scattered far and wide. They had made arrangements for extra help while the sale was in progress.

While busy at work, they were interrupted by Jim Lawson, one of the church stewards coming in at the door.

"Good-morning, folks," he said pleasantly. "We're trying to organize the church budget for the coming year. What can I put you down for, Mr. Kyle?"

Eben's chin went up.

"Business is awful dull, Jim," he said dolefully. "The most of my customers nowadays are solicitors."

"Pardon me, Mr. Lawson, but I'd like to ask you a question," Elizabeth Kyle interposed. "Where are you doing your trading?"

Her point-blank question caught him off his guard, and he colored slightly.

"Why — why, I believe my wife has been buying her groceries from Loomis Brothers."

"You're not the only one," she said, eyeing him keenly. "We've worked hard to help keep the church going, and to see you members give your business to our competitor has hurt."

"Have you solicited Loomis Brothers for a contribution toward the church budget?" Eben asked quickly, his eyes flashing.

Lawson, with his eyes averted, replied:

"Well, no, in fact, I hadn't thought about it. They've never attended our church. I don't presume there would be any use."

Eben's color rose. "I see no reason why they shouldn't make a contribution, that is, if they're public spirited," he said earnestly. "They're making their living here, enjoying all the privileges that the rest of us do, why shouldn't they?"

Lawson admitted that what Eben said was true, and agreed to ask for a contribution. He made his way slowly across the street. He was greeted by the senior member of the firm, a gray-haired, spectacled man, rather pleasant in manner.

"Pardon me, Mr. Loomis, but we're making up the church budget for the coming year," Lawson said affably. "You being one of our leading business men, I knew you'd want to make a small contribution."

The merchant patted Lawson on the shoulder in a friendly manner.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Lawson, but we limit our contributions to charity. We have never contributed toward the upkeep of churches," he said.

Lawson thanked him and walked back across the street. He repeated to the Kyles the conversation that he had had with Mr. Loomis.

"Humph!" Eben ejaculated. "There's an eye opener for you, Jim. Well, you can put us down for one hundred dollars this year, but how we're going to raise it, I'm sure I don't know. I've never seen the time yet when I couldn't dig up something for God's work."

"Praise the Lord!" his wife shouted.

Eben's next callers were a delegation of women from the Ladies' Aid Society led by Mrs. Elmer Hathaway. The leader's face was wreathed in smiles, and one could tell that she was putting on her very best manners. An ostentatious person with dark hair and blue eyes, she loved to be in the spotlight.

"Good-morning, Mr. Kyle — good-morning, Elizabeth," she said in a most affected manner, and without giving them a chance to reply, she continued: "I just wanted to inform you that our unit is holding a Food Sale in your store Saturday afternoon."

Elizabeth Kyle eyed the women for a moment and said:

"I'd like to ask you women where you're doing your trading?"

Mrs. Hathaway colored.

"Why," she began, somewhat flustered, "we've been buying our groceries from Loomis Brothers." She turned toward the other women, who admitted with a nod of their head that they traded there also.

"Now look here, girls," said Elizabeth. "I'm not doing this in a carping spirit, but I want to suggest that you go across the street and ask those gentlemen for permission to use their store for your sale."

Mrs. Hathaway's chin went up in the air.

"Why, what in the world is the matter?" she asked.

"Nothing, Edith, I just want you people to learn which side your bread is buttered on, that's all," she said firmly. "We've got to live just the same as the rest of you."

The women, their heads held high, walked across the street.

"I'm very sorry," said Mr. Loomis, when informed of their errand, "but our building is too small to take care of our own business. I'd suggest that you try one of the other stores."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Hathaway.

Needless to say, the following Saturday Eben's store was piled high with cakes, pies, homemade candy, and cooked meats. A few of the women started trading with him again, but not for long, the lure of the new store was too great.

Eben's sale began on Monday morning. Prices had been slashed, and tremendous bargains could be had. As the sale advanced, it was a disappointment. The people came and looked over the stock, but the terms being cash kept many of them from buying. After the extra help had been paid, Eben could only realize five hundred dollars toward his indebtedness.

"Fifteen hundred short of my goal!" he mused. Then, turning to his wife, he said: "Well, there is nothing to do but notify the creditors. Devins at the Farmers National is fighting me, and Sylvester Andrews at the First National has carried me too long already!"

"There must be some way out, Eben," he wife said. "You mustn't lose hope."

Vane dropped in that afternoon and Eben confided to him that he was being forced to quit business; that the new store across the street had taken all his trade.

"I have Devins to thank for this," Eben declared gravely. "He was instrumental in bringing Loomis Brothers to town. There isn't enough business here for so many stores."

Vane's heart ached for his old friend, whom he knew was a good honest merchant and loyal to his people. In the few months that he had been there he had become much attached to the elderly couple. He had observed that they stood for whatever was best for the town and community. The majority of the people were going stark mad, he earnestly believed. They seemed to have no regard for anyone save themselves. He could almost see the handwriting on the wall. Devins and Parker and Welborn were determined to run the town to suit themselves. Well, he still had Andrews and Blake on his side, he reflected. . . . They'd try to make it tough sledding for them.

"You don't know how sorry I am, Mr. Kyle," he said with deep emotion. "Maybe it will be possible to salvage enough from the wreckage to start in business again on a smaller scale."

"Might, but I don't think it possible," Eben returned. "Loomis Brothers have no interest in our town other than to make money. What do they care about our young people, whether they have advantages or not? What do they care whether our schools are improved, our churches kept up?"

"That's right, Mr. Kyle; it's such men as you and Andrews and Blake that have made the town what it is today. I shudder when I think what the future holds for us."

When Eben reached home that night, he seated himself by his wife and said:

"I guess we'll be paupers in our old age, Elizabeth."

"How will you ever stand up under it, Eben?" she asked with a nervous gesture of her hands. "To see you old and broken in spirit after all your years of effort makes my heart ache!" She laid her knitting aside and sobbed quietly.

Eben sat with his head down, obviously in deep thought.

"Don't you think we might place a mortgage on this house and save the stock?" she asked, slightly regaining her com-

posure. "Why, you've gone to that store for years and years Eben! What in the world would you ever do without it?"

Eben shook his head.

"This house is all we have left," he said retrospectively. "Possibly I can get a job clerking for Loomis Brothers and we can live on here."

"No, not that, Eben!" his wife remonstrated. "I'd rather go to the poor farm than see you affiliated with our competitors!"

Eben gazed about the house reminiscingly.

"How long have we lived here, Elizabeth?"

"Thirty years, Eben," she said complacently. "Don't you remember what a shack it was when we first moved into it? My, what pride we took in making each new addition!"

"Thirty long and happy years!" Eben exclaimed. "Well, we'll let the store go, but we'll keep a roof over our heads. Do you know what grieves me most, Elizabeth?"

"No, Eben, what is it?" she asked interestedly.

"The fact that the poor people will be shut off. We won't be able to help them."

Elizabeth Kyle nervously tapped the arm of her chair with her fingers.

"Well, I reckon you've always been too generous, Eben, for your own good. It has been the cause of your downfall."

Eben's face was serious.

"Quite true, Elizabeth, but somehow I'm glad that I've done what I have. While we've been reduced to poverty, we are still human. Our hearts haven't been turned to stone by silver dollars."

A month later, Eben's stock was sold at auction by his creditors, and he joined the large army of unemployed.

## 10

**I**N AN old-fashioned house at the end of the main street in Seven Corners lived Grandma Hildebrandt and her son Jimmie. Painted white, with green shutters and a gabled roof, the old house was reminiscent of the pioneer. It was built by some early settlers from the East, who later abandoned the place and returned to New England.

Grandma lived mostly in the past. When she and Jim Hildebrandt were married forty years back, they hadn't had a thing to start out with, only their courage. On her wedding day, her mother had given her a feather bed, and Jim's father had given him a horse that was blind in one eye. So on a forty acre tract of timber land that was homesteaded, they set up housekeeping. Jim had set to work clearing off the timber, and getting the new ground ready to cultivate. Doing her cooking in an iron skillet over a fireplace was no easy task for grandma, but somehow she didn't mind it back in those days. Fried ham and corn fritters and a pot of beans were on the daily menu. She always kept plenty of work ahead to occupy her time. She read her Bible regularly, and found a world of comfort in its pages. With a few chickens, and a cow that was loaned to them to milk, she and her stalwart husband managed to keep the cupboard from being bare.

The long years that grandma had spent on a hilly farm, however, had plainly left their mark. Her figure was bent, the elasticity was gone from her step. She kept her courage, though, and was always hopeful. When her husband died, two years back, he had left her a river farm and the property

in Seven Corners, so she and her son had come to town to live. She was all wrapped up in her boy and didn't want him to have to endure the hardships that she had gone through. She hoped to set him up in business of some sort; she knew that he was clever at fixing harness, and repair work of all kinds, but the town was overcrowded with such shops; consequently Jimmie was idle a great deal of the time and loitering on the streets.

Grandma's hands were never idle. She still kept her old loom, with which for years she had woven carpets for her neighbors, and many came to her to get their weaving done. Her home, while old-fashioned, was comfortable. She had a way of arranging and rearranging the old wooden bedsteads and the old bureau, which had come to her from her mother, that suited her own particular taste. The rag rugs, the gay patch-work quilts which she had made, made her rooms look homey and comfortable. Her downy featherbeds and fluffy pillows bespoke comfort. She loved flowers, and her yard was filled with many of the old-fashioned varieties: house leek and cactus, and morning glories of many different colors surrounded the house, while on the lawn was a heart-shaped flower bed filled with blooming moss.

She was a great home lover, and seldom went out except to church. When she was able, she attended regularly. She had slipped on the ice just when winter was breaking and injured her hip, and for the past two months had hardly been able to get about. Jimmie had made the garden for her.

On this day Grandma was piddling around in her tiny kitchen doing first one task and then another. The four-holed cookstove was sending forth sweltering blasts of heat, and steam was pouring from the gray granite teakettle on the stove. She didn't have a kitchen cabinet, but several small homemade cupboards were nailed to the wall where she kept her dishes and kitchen utensils. The floor was bare, but

spotlessly clean. She looked about the place for Jimmie. He hadn't been acting like himself lately. He moped around without saying a word to anyone. Until the past few days, he had never gone out at night, but of late he had not been particular when he came home. . . . She would often wait up for him, which action he resented, often speaking harshly to her for not going on to bed.

"'Pears to me you're not a-actin' like yerself, Jimmie," she said to him that evening after they had had their supper. Her voice was maternal.

Jimmie, a lad of nineteen years, with light hair and blue eyes, was a reticent type of youth, very difficult to understand.

"Hit's nothin', Ma," he replied, and climbed the stairs to bed.

Before many days, he came to her and asked for money.

"What's come o' all yore money, Jimmie?" she asked in a surprised manner.

His face was glum. He sat down opposite his mother, propping his elbows on the table, his eyes fastened on her face.

"Hit's all gone, Ma, ever' cent o' hit. Them fellers tuck hit 'way from me." His tone was that of a man who felt that everyone was against him.

Grandma's eyes widened.

"Tuck hit 'way from you?" she gasped. "What fellers air you a-meanin', Jimmie?"

He ran his fingers through his mop of unruly hair and replied:

"Why, them fellers down't the resort."

"Resort?" his mother cried, throwing up her hands in a despairing gesture. "You don't mean to tell me that you've took t' goin' to sich a place as that?" A strange light shone in her eyes.

Jimmie flushed crimson.

"Jim Cullimor' tuck me thar one night, an' I've been a-goin' sinct," he confessed rather unwillingly.

Grandma's eyes flashed fire.

"Jim Cullimor! Dog! Hound! Tuck you thar, did he?" She bit her teeth. "Dirty bootlegger, that's all he is! You'd best stop hit, Jimmie, 'fore hit's the ruination o' you. I'd throw my money 'way 'fore I'd be a-spendin' hit in sich a place at that!"

Jimmie, with eyes averted, replied:

"I guess I lost hit fair, Ma. I war a-playin' cards. They had hit all in a pot, an' the fust thing I know'd hit war all gone, an' they war a-askin' fer more."

Grandma tucked her head sadly.

"Well, well, my Jimmie a-gamblin', hit's terrible! I might have know what the town would do to you. I wish now that I had kept you on the farm. The younger generation don't know nothin' 'bout what we used to go through or they wouldn't be so careless with money. When you war born, Jimmie, we didn't have a blanket to wrap you in. Who'd ever a-thought hit would come to this?"

Jimmie hung his head in shame. He tried to speak a time or two, but his voice failed him.

"Yore pappy'd hate mighty bad to hyear this, Jimmie," she went on. "I'm glad that he'll never know. He war awful strict 'bout anything like gamblin'." Her mind seemed to trail off in deep retrospection for a moment, then she continued: "You're a great deal like yore pappy in many ways, you ain't much to say. He war a powerful good man, strong an' courageous, an' life ain't been the same fer me sinct he died. My heart is buried with him."

Grandma could never talk long on any subject without her mind going back into the past.

Jimmie listened to her reminiscences with a look of impatience.

"We went through a great many hardships together, yore pap an' I," she resumed dreamily. "But pshaw, hit warn't bad. I wouldn't mind doin' hit over ag'in. Seems like s'long as we had each other hit didn't matter. The place whar you war born, Jimmie, war jest a hut; thar war cracks in the winders that we had to stuff with rags to keep the cold out. I often worried in those days fer fear you'd git pneumonia an' die, but the Lord war good to us. He's allus good to us, son, if we live right. Thar war long winter evenin's when we had to keep pilin' logs on the old fireplace to keep from freezin'. A-many a-time, I've gone out in the snow an' helped yore pappy saw wood. I recollect one winter when we war snowed in durin' the whole month o' January. The roads war blocked with snow an' impassable. We ran outen provisions, an' help got thar jest in time."

Jimmie, obviously anxious to bring his mother back to the subject that was eating his heart out, said:

"You'll be a-helpin' me out o' this, won't you, Ma?"

Grandma's face changed to sadness again.

"We worked mighty hard fer what we've got, Jimmie, an' you orter not squander hit 'way. I can't find hit in my heart to refuse you anything. You must stay 'way from that thar resort. That bunch is jest triflin' an' ornery an' no 'count. You'll be a-gittin' yerself inter bad trouble the fust thing you know."

Jimmie squirmed uncomfortably.

"I reckon I'm a'ready in trouble, Ma. They said I'd best bring the money t'night 'r they'd send the sheriff after me." His voice was shaky.

Grandma eyed him with astonishment.

"How much have you lost, Jimmie?" she gasped.

Jimmie rose to his feet and moved restlessly about the room, his eyes troubled.

"They say hit's nigh onto a hundred dollars, but I'm a-feared they're a-crookin' me."

His mother's eyes widened.

"A hundred dollars!" she gasped. "Why, that's 'most 'nough to set you up in business. You don't have to give 'em that much, d'you?"

Jimmie walled his eyes and said in a voice of trepidation: "They've been a-threatenin' me ever' night 'cause I ain't a-bringin' hit." He slumped down into a chair spiritlessly.

Grandma's eyes grew wider.

"Threatenin' you, eh? What right have sich men as that to threaten anybody? They'd orter all be throwed in jail an' kept thar."

There was a moment of horrified silence. Jimmie's head was bowed in grief.

"Jimmie!" his mother's voice broke, and she paused to wipe her eyes with her apron. "If you'll promise me that this'll be the last time, an' that you'll not be a-goin' to that place any more, I'll he'p you."

Jimmie moved a trifle closer, and said submissively:

"I promise, Ma. I'll be mighty glad to stay 'way from thar."

From a pocket in her skirt, Grandma drew out a wallet. By the dim light of the kerosene lamp, she counted out some bills and gave them to her son.

"Now thar's a hundred dollars even. That's money I've saved from time to time from my weavin'. You've been a mighty good boy, Jimmie, an' I'm not a-losin' faith in you fer this first 'fence. Somebody's got you inter this trouble, an' I'm a-aimin' to find out who hit is. I'll speak to Mr. Andrews 'bout hit."

Jimmie eyed his mother with disapproval.

"I'd rather you wouldn't, Ma," he entreated.

Grandma suddenly tumbled down into her chair. The news had been too much for her. Her whole body began to shake with emotion. Jimmie sat speechless, his face haggard and worn. Getting to his feet, he put on his hat and made for the door. With a last look toward his mother, he opened the door and went out.

Grandma waited up until long past midnight for him, but he didn't come. When the old clock on the wall struck twelve she nervously paced the floor. One — two o'clock, and still he did not come.

"My boy! My boy!" she wailed, and dropping into a chair, she went into a deep swoon.

## 11

MEN with faces of all descriptions, and ranging from stalwart hill-bbillies to slick city dudes, lounged about the many-tabled room of Parker's Resort. On this evening in particular, the place was alive with the hum of conversation, the rattle of poker chips, and the click of billard balls. A radio was sending forth cheap jazz music, and glasses rattled on the counter. Loud and boisterous laughter broke forth occasionally from all parts of the room as men, half-sitting and half-standing, slapped the cards on the table in an excited manner. Oaths and threats could be heard on every hand. One large, red-nosed, bulky man, with piercing black eyes was far more loquacious than the rest. His name was Jim Cullimore. His place joined that of Parker, and he had opened a hotel in connection with the resort. Men who wished to spend several days in their favorite pastime of gambling were well taken care of in his hostelry and sumptuous meals were served at popular prices.

Parker, encouraged by his increasing patronage, advertised his place in the out-of-town newspapers as a Recreational Resort. His wife had recently joined him and opened a dance hall on the second floor of the building. When night came, automobiles swarmed in from all directions carrying a flood of youth in search of excitement. Parker catered to all classes of people, and tried to make every man feel that he was his friend.

Jimmie Hildebrandt, rather dazed and distraught from the scene with his mother, entered the resort and seated himself

in a quiet corner of the room. He intended to pay Cullimore the hundred dollars and return home, but once inside, the excitement — the glamor of the place — cast a spell over him. The smoke-filled room was all confusion. Several men were standing at the bar with upraised glasses, others seated at tables playing cards. One could tell by the expression on the faces of the players that they were putting their whole soul into it. They played for the drinks, for money, or whatever inducement was offered, and there appeared to be no limit to their speculations.

Parker went from table to table greeting each customer with a friendly word or a slap on the back. With a broad smile on his face, he obviously tried to make everyone feel that it was a pleasure to serve them.

A tall, husky man with a pair of green gray eyes, approached Jimmie and said:

"We're starting a new table over here. Would you like to get in?"

Jimmie shook his head.

"I'm not playin' to-night," he said.

"You're goin' to miss a lot of fun," the stranger retorted, walking away.

At one table, a hilarious party was taking place. An argument developed there that brought the whole house to its feet. Four men were playing poker.

"You reneged!" shouted one of the players, a tall, gruff looking man with a wart on his nose.

"I tell you, I didn't!" replied the other hotly.

The first speaker rose to his feet quickly and threw his cards on the table face up.

"I'm through playin' with a crook!" he yelled.

"Who are you callin' a crook?" the other remonstrated, jumping to his feet in a rage.

A group of men from the other tables, attracted by the excitement, surrounded the men, but before a blow had been struck, Parker and Cullimore nudged in and ushered the men outside.

Parker went up to young Hildebrandt, and placing a hand on his shoulder, said:

"Come with me, there's some fellows here I want you to meet."

Jimmie cringed against the wall.

"I'm not a-playin' to-night, Parker. I came up to pay my debts. I'm through."

"Well, well, now, that's all right, my boy. We weren't tryin' to crowd you. Anyway, come along and meet these boys. They're a fine bunch of chaps." His voice was coaxing.

Jimmie, like clay in his hands, allowed himself to be led. Parker, without permitting him to utter another word of protest, led him out into a hallway. There was an open door in the rear wall that led into another hall, and doors on each side that led into private rooms. It was to one of these that the proprietor of the resort led the boy. Three men were in the room, seated at a table. One was short with a round face, and he had a deep scar that ran from the corner of his mouth to his right ear. He wore a fancy checked vest, and a large diamond glittered on the little finger of his right hand. His hair was coal black, his skin dark, his face reflecting gruffness and a tremendous will. His mouth was thin and secretive, his chin forceful. His eyes flickered curiously. The others addressed him as "Blackie." The other two men were obviously westerners, wearing rough clothing, slouch hats, and breeches stuffed into their boot tops.

Parker introduced Jimmie to the men.

The proprietor exchanged a few words with Blackie in low tones. The other two men appeared to be deeply absorbed in a conversation of their own.

"Good crowd to-night, plenty of excitement for everybody!" Parker said as he left the room.

"Come, you're the fourth man, I reckon," said Blackie, addressing Jimmie, and winking at the man opposite him.

Jimmie leaned against the wall, a grim look on his face.

"I reckon I'll stay out to-night," he replied in a choked voice. His lips were quivering from fright.

Low muttered exclamations and secretive glances were exchanged between the three men. Blackie nervously tapped the table with his fingers. His shoulders moved restlessly. Jimmie's terrified gaze moved from one to the other.

The gambler shoved the boy down into a chair, and said with husky voice:

"Everybody plays to-night!" Then, turning to one of his companions, he added: "I wonder if the lad thinks he's at a play-party?"

Jimmie, in the clutches of men of Blackie's type, was obviously helpless. A waiter entered bearing a tray with four cocktails. Blackie took one of the glasses and offered it to the boy.

Jimmie accepted the glass, and a smile of pleasure crossed the gambler's face. All of his movements were quick and furtive. He served the other men, and whispered something to the waiter.

By this time, a number of other men had entered the room and stood looking on. They were sleek, sallow chaps with coarse manners, who swore profusely. That this was young Hildebrandt's first introduction to men of this type was quite obvious. His voice cracked pitifully when he spoke, and his face was white.

"Poker?" Blackie inquired, exhaling a cloud of cigarette smoke as his deft fingers shuffled the cards. The other men grunted agreement, while Jimmie said nothing. With the

same lightning speed that he had shuffled them, he dealt them out.

Jimmie, obviously lacking the courage to say 'no,' allowed himself to be drawn into the game against his will.

The game got under way, and for the first few hands, the men allowed Jimmie to make a little headway; and the boy, obviously encouraged by his luck, played with considerable enthusiasm. But later, when the men began to play in earnest, the lad soon found that the hundred dollars which his mother had given him to pay Cullimore was gone.

Blackie eyed the boy, then grinned at his companions.

"Let's drink to the health of the hill-billy!" he said in low tones.

One of the men who was getting groggy, drawled:

"And may he live long and prosper!"

A roar of laughter followed.

While this was taking place, a woman entered the room. Her light hair was neatly waved, and her slender body swathed in a long evening gown of pink silk, cut low in the back. She had swept into the room with the grace of a queen, while men yelled her name from all directions. Jewels glittered on her slim fingers, and a necklace of shiny white pearls adorned her bony neck. She was still beautiful in a made-up fashion, but years of improper living had etched tiny lines around her once youthful face. She presented a strange contrast to those about her. With a broad smile on her face, revealing shiny white teeth, her glance traveled from one to the other.

"What's going on here?" she asked, placing an arm on Blackie's shoulder.

"Why, hello there, old darling!" said Blackie, grabbing her by the arm. His familiarity hinted of former meetings.

Jimmie's eyes gleamed with an insane look. He sat with his mouth wide open.

The moment Belle Parker spied him, she jumped to her feet and said:

"What's wrong here?" and moving toward Jimmie, she placed an arm about him. "Why look so glum? . . . Would you like to come upstairs and dance?"

The men laughed uproariously.

Jimmie rousing up, yawned prodigiously.

"I reckon not," he returned. His chair was about to move from under him.

Blackie dealt the cards again. Suddenly, and before the deal was completed, one of the men jumped to his feet and yelled in a coarse voice:

"You dealt yourself two off the bottom!"

"I did nothing of the kind!" flashed Blackie, rising to his feet with a mean look in his eyes.

The westerner was large, raw-boned and well-proportioned. He dealt Blackie a blow that made him groggy and started the blood streaming from his nose, but he fought back desperately. Soon, the large man dealt him another blow that sent him sprawling to the floor with a jar that shook the glasses on the table.

"Nobody deals cards off the bottom to me!" he yelled, and rushed out the door.

A crowd had gathered from the other rooms, and there was an angry movement among them. With low muttered exclamations and growling comments, they stood over the gambler speculatively. Parker and Cullimore rushed in and picked Blackie up and carried him out.

Suddenly, some one fired a revolver, the lights went out at the same time, and there was much scuffling of feet and moving about. Someone finally replaced the battered bulb, and the room was illuminated once more.

Jimmie's body began shaking, and in another moment, he fell into a crumpled heap to the floor. What to do about it,

nobody seemed to know. Things were happening too fast. Belle Parker gazed at the boy's limp body on the floor, and then at the crowd. She stooped and felt his pulse.

"Fetch a doctor quick!" she yelled.

Somebody spoke about the sheriff. Parker rushed back in excitement.

"What's happened now?" he flashed.

His wife gave him the details.

"This is poor business!" he roared, his face full of anger, then, turning to the crowd, he added: "You'd better scram! We're liable to receive a visit from the sheriff."

There was a mad scramble for the hallway.

## 12

VANE, feeling the need of some physical exercise, was spading the garden the following morning when he spied Mrs. Moss coming toward him with an active step. He knew from her actions that something of grave concern had happened, for she was wiping away the tears that filled her eyes. He dropped his spade, and waited breathlessly for the news.

"I'm sorry, Brother Cheltenham, but I have some very bad news," she said in a tone of deep feeling. "They've just taken young Jimmie Hildebrandt home from the resort in a stupor. They don't think he'll live; poison liquor or something. It'll just simply kill his old mother!"

"I'll go over at once, Mrs. Moss," he said.

Mrs. Moss, with bowed head, said:

"I'll tell you, Brother Cheltenham, it's about time that something was done to stop Parker's corrupt practices. They tell me that terrible things are taking place there. Young Hildebrandt is a good boy, he was enticed into that place, I'm sure."

With a prayer in his heart, Vane set out upon his errand of mercy. He didn't know the Hildebrandts very well, but they were members of his church. The boy, he had observed, was timid and hard to get acquainted with. There were plenty of troublesome thoughts to keep him unwelcome company as he made his way down the street. He could see his enemies still coming in, trying to destroy the church. When he thought of all the trouble that Parker was causing in the community strange passions surged through him and threatened to overwhelm him.

Approaching the home of Grandma Hildebrandt, he saw that the house and yard was filled with people. Friends and

neighbors likely he thought, who had come to offer help and to extend sympathy. The crowd moved back at his approach and opened a lane for him. Nodding to the people, he slowly made his way into the house where young Jimmie, almost lifeless, lay on the bed. His mother was seated in a chair close by, weeping and talking hysterically. She was telling them how Jim Cullimore had induced her son to go to the resort, and how after he had fallen deeply in debt, he had come to her for money, and that last night's trip was to be his last. He had promised her that he would pay them what he owed them and go no more.

Going toward Grandma, Vane placed his arm protectingly around her, then, kneeling beside the bed, he prayed earnestly that God would spare the boy's life.

"Hit's too late, Brother Cheltenham," Grandma sobbed. "He ain't ever a-comin' to! My boy, my boy, what have I done that I must suffer so! He's all that I have, I jest can't give him up!" Her whole body was shaking with emotion.

Marian Andrews sat close by grandma, comforting her in whatever way she could. Mollie Blake sat on the other side of the bed, her old face stained with tears.

"You must be brave, Grandma, and hope for the best," Marian whispered.

Seeing the deathlike look on the lad's face, he knew that there was no hope for him, and his heart ached for the mother who would be left alone; and when he thought of the men who were responsible for it, he couldn't help feeling bitter.

Silently they watched about the bedside until the last breath of life had left the boy, and Dr. Atkinson pronounced him dead.

"Come, Grandma," said Marian, placing an arm affectionately about her. "Remember, God's will, not ours, be done!"

"They've killed him Marian! Hit's jest plain murder!" Grandma shouted in a hysterical manner.

"They'll have to suffer for it, dear, they always do," said Marian, patting her shoulder affectionately. "If not in this world, they will in the next!"

Dr. Atkinson insisted that an analysis must be taken of the lad's stomach, to determine the exact cause of his death.

Vane sought out Sylvester Andrews and informed him of young Jimmie's death.

"Parker's work!" Andrews blurted quickly.

"I'll tell you, Brother Andrews, I've never in all my life had anything like this! Come with me to the resort, will you?"

Andrews grabbed his hat and followed him. Reaching the resort, they briskly threw open the front door and boldly faced Parker, who was seated at a table playing solitaire. Vane, his fists clenched, hurled bitter words of accusation at the astonished resort keeper who sat there, his face white.

"Young Hildebrandt is dead!" Vane cried in a high-pitched voice. "And if the authorities take the action which I believe they will, you'll be held responsible for his death!"

"Look here, gentlemen!" Parker said, leaping to his feet. "You can't hold me responsible for that boy's death. This is a public place here, I can't keep watch on them all. From what I can learn, the lad suffered a stroke of some kind!"

"Stroke, eh!" said Vane, and his fist came down with a blow that shook the glasses on the counter. "This place you're operating here is a disgrace to any respectable community! I want you to know that we're wise to you—that you're not fooling as many as you might think!" His gaze traveled about the room. The place had been remodeled and many new improvements added since his last glimpse of the joint. Only a few men were in the resort at that hour, and they were strangers to him. Just why a place of that type could grow

and expand while the churches of the country sank into decay was more than he could understand.

Parker never opened his mouth after that, and after Vane and Andrews had had their say, they made their way up the street. The whole town was gripped in a spell of tense anxiety. Men were gathering in groups on every corner, discussing the lad's death. Feeling was running high against Parker.

This surely, Vane thought, will be the end of the resort. The authorities simply wouldn't tolerate such a place after what had just happened, he reflected.

The autopsy, held by the physicians from Hillsboro, resealed nothing, and just what had caused Jimmie Hildebrandt's death brought out a world of unsatisfying conjecture. Various causes were mentioned, but discarded as unreliable. Many accused the doctors of being in sympathy with the Parker element. The resort was raided by the county officers, and a rigorous investigation held, but no incriminating evidence could be found. Feverish excitement prevailed, and many threats were heard about town. Parker kept under cover, it wouldn't have been safe for him to appear on the street.

Meanwhile, preparations were going forward for the lad's funeral. Vane, with a deep feeling of pity in his heart, was a great comfort to grandma in her great sorrow. He explained that she must submit to God's will and look to Him for consolation.

It seemed that no one realized just how much they loved the little old lady until they saw her stooped in grief. Streams of people swarmed in and out of the house to view the remains and extend sympathy. People came from far out in the hills, carrying bouquets of wild flowers, to pay their respects. Grandma was the recipient of many warm embraces and words of sympathy from her neighbors.

The following afternoon, at two o'clock, the funeral was

held at the Hildebrandt home. The fence about the house was lined with conveyances of all types. Swarms of people moved about the place, going in and out the doors with a sad look on their faces.

Soon, the voice of the pastor was heard delivering the funeral sermon. "*Vengeance is mine, I will repay,*" saith the Lord. "*Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.*" While this poor boy gave up his life, grant that it shall not be in vain! Perhaps by the sacrifice, the eyes of the people will be opened, and others will be saved from a similar fate; and grant that through it all, something finer and better will come."

There is a bond of love in sorrow that knows no conventionalities. There wasn't a dry eye in the room when the sermon was concluded. The people obviously felt drawn to one another. When death entered a home, Vane observed, a great transformation took place. No longer did people's mind dwell on earthly things, but soared to the things of the spirit. Whatever ill feelings or grudges that may have existed, vanished in the face of the grim reaper.

At four o'clock the casket was carried out, and the conveyances, all well filled, followed the sad procession to the lonely graveyard. The newly-dug grave was at the far end of the cemetery, and they all formed silently around it.

The voices of the choir was heard, followed by the pastor's voice with a few closing words.

It was a sunny afternoon, and the shadows of the great elms were beginning to lengthen as they laid the boy to rest. Grandma, looking so much alone, so infinitesimal, was escorted from the graveyard by Marian Andrews. The old lady was leaving behind her all that was dear to her on earth.

"They're both hyear now, Marian, an' all I have left is jest my memories!" she said in a faint voice. "It war a bleak

day when I laid my husband t' rest, an' hit left my life so empty!"

Returning from the cemetery, the sun was setting behind the hills. Vane, with Marian Andrews, accompanied grandma home. She bore up wonderfully well under the strain. That evening, more people came, hoping to comfort the mother who had been called upon to give up everything that made life worth living. In silence the group sat on the porch and watched the moon as she slowly crept up over the hills; higher and higher it climbed until Seven Corners was enveloped into a sea of light. Many kind words were spoken of the lad who had gone from their midst forever.

As Vane sat beside the little mother, he felt a strange reverence for her. He felt that he was in the presence of someone very grand and noble and kind. "God made such mothers, bestowing upon them patience and forbearance!" he whispered to Marian Andrews.

"He might a-called me 'stead o' my boy, Brother Cheltenham," said grandma thoughtfully. "I'm old an not wuth much any more."

Vane gazed upon grandma's bent form with a look of admiration, then patting her arm affectionately, said:

"God has a way of doing things, Grandma, of which we know nothing. Maybe He knows best."

Grandma seemed to find comfort in the thought.

\* \* \*

Following the funeral, the good citizens of the town, led by Cheltenham, Blake and Andrews, decided to wage a bitter war against the resort. A strong friendship sprung up between Sylvester Andrews and the young pastor. Vane found himself instinctively drawn to Andrews; found that he was a man who could forget self and devote himself to the welfare of others.

"What do you think of the attempt to quiet this affair?" asked Andrews, during one of their confidential chats.

The furrow in Vane's brow deepened.

"I'm greatly depressed over it, Brother Andrews, but what can we do about it?"

Andrews eyed the pastor interestedly.

"That's the question. Parker is responsible for the lad's death without a doubt, yet we have no way of proving it. Nothing could be gleaned from any of his associates that would shed any light on the case. Parker maintains that the boy suddenly collapsed from a stroke of some kind, and that he was in no way responsible."

"Unless some steps are taken to close the resort, I fear that others will suffer," said Vane apprehensively.

A spasm of pain slanted across Andrews face.

"Devins controls the council, dominates the Mayor, and is in cahoots with Parker. With such a state of affairs, it'll be hard to get them to take any action."

"It isn't precisely what one would expect from such substantial citizens," Vane declared with considerable earnestness.

Andrews voice took on spirit.

"Devins is all for himself. With half of our citizens mortgaging their property to pay taxes, and hundreds of people on county relief, he takes no interest in the situation."

"To what do you attribute such an attitude?" Vane inquired.

"Pure selfishness!" Andrews replied spiritedly. "He has erected a barrier between himself and others, and tries to ram his own ideas down every throat. He listens to no one, and denounces all those who oppose him. As for me, Brother Cheltenham, I intend to stand by my people to the finish. I owe everything that I am or ever hope to be to them. We're facing a crisis every bit as serious as the war, and if necessary, I'll give up everything that I possess to see them through."

Vane's face brightened. Studying the man before him, he could readily see what an influence he had been in the community. He liked his principles.

"That's a fine spirit you show, Brother Andrews," he said with feeling. "Very commendable."

Andrews looked grave.

"Devins' failure to cooperate with our bank is causing a severe strain on us, and I'm fearful of the outcome," he went on, obviously warmed by the pastor's interest. "Few people realize a banker's responsibilities. In conducting the affairs of the First National, I've tried to keep human, to put myself in the other fellow's shoes. I've been lenient when it was possible for me to do so, and I'll not foreclose on a man until all other means of settlement, including my personal help, have failed. Many of our people come to me complaining about the treatment that they've received at the hands of Devins at the Farmers National. In dealing with the poorer classes, he has shown no mercy. Just a few weeks back, he foreclosed on Jim Young who lives over on the ridge. There never was a better nor a more honest man than Jim, but he's trimmed now, and hasn't even got a roof over his head."

Vane's face bore a serious look.

"Pardon me, Brother Cheltenham, but Devins is a scoundrel if there ever was one. He lives here among us, enjoying all the privileges that the rest of us do, yet he'll contribute absolutely nothing to the public welfare. If a man goes to his bank for a loan and doesn't have gilt-edged security, he sends him over to the First National."

Vane drummed thoughtfully on the table.

"No man can live for himself alone, Brother Andrews. In time, he is bound to reap the harvest that he is sowing. The only way to be happy, in my opinion, is to live a life in which we're of service to our fellow men. The Bible says: '*Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established.*' Isn't

it strange how men will covet money, power, and social position above everything else? And what does it profit a man though he gain all these and lose his own soul? To be needed, to be constantly building up ourselves, our town and community, to be an example and an inspiration to others, that is the spirit that will bring one the greatest reward."

"You're quite right, Brother Cheltenham," Andrews agreed. "I've been uneasy here of late for fear that Devins' meddling would cause a run on our bank. If that ever happens, it'll be just too bad. Once he has the people in his power, he'll show them no mercy."

"God will help you find a way out of your difficulties, Brother Andrews," said Vane confidently. "Such fine and unselfish service as you have rendered this community is bound to be rewarded."

"Hundreds of banks have gone under during this depression, but we'll hope for the best. Now, in regard to this man Parker, I really believe that the officers are shielding him. Encouraging, isn't it?"

Vane's brow clouded.

"We're going to have to fight hard, Brother Andrews. There must be some way that we can make our influence felt."

"I'm surprised at Mayor Welborn," went on Andrews. "He's a good fellow at heart, but has no backbone. He's easily led, and Devins' mercenary mind controls him."

Vane rose to his feet, and patted Andrews on the shoulder.

"Never mind, Sylvester, let us pray for those men that their eyes may be opened, and that their hearts will be softened. It's going to take time to solve the problems here, but I believe that eventually we'll succeed."

When Vane left late in the afternoon, tentative plans had been made to organize the young people, and to wage a bitter war against the resort.

## 13

IT WAS a clear Sabbath morning, the air was balmy and bracing, and the peace of God seemed to be over all the hill country. Dolores and her mother, returning from church, loitered in the yard. It had been an unusually good spring, with an abundance of rainfall, and all nature was resplendent with foliage and flower. The roses were in bloom, and the air was filled with their perfume. Now in the treetops, the birds gave vent to their feelings in song.

Dolores' slender and graceful body was swathed in a dress of green crepe, and a becoming white hat sat far back on her head. That she knew the value of good grooming was quite obvious. Her mother wore a white linen frock made perfectly plain, and a black hat. An ardent church worker and devout Christian, Sunday morning invariably found her at church.

"How did you like the pastor's sermon this morning, Mother?" asked Dolores thoughtfully.

Mollie Blake's eyes lit with interest.

"Splendid. He's doing wonderful work. He is, by far, the best pastor that we've ever had. He directs, encourages, and gets down to the real fundamentals. Really, I've never seen anyone to compare with him," she declared.

Dolores, obviously pleased with her mother's reply, stooped and gathered a huge bouquet of larkspurs.

"These old-fashioned flowers are one of my earliest recollections," she said, gazing at them avidly. "I believe that I love them more each year."

"They do help make the atmosphere of a home, don't they?" her mother returned. "They're so much company. They cheer us along when our hearts are sad. I'm so glad that you love them, dear."

Dolores kept arranging the bouquet until the colors all blended to suit her particular taste.

"I couldn't help it, Mother, for all my life I've watched you care for them. I used to think sometimes when I was a child that you gave them more attention than you did your children."

Mollie Blake smiled. "Well, I guess I am somewhat obsessed by them. I feel so near the Savior when I gaze upon them in all their beautiful colors." She stooped to examine a gorgeous double yellow marigold. "God has chosen this way of showing us His great love. Children are similar to flowers, they start from a seed and need most careful nurture and bringing up. Everything that God has created is perfect and should remain so."

Dolores gazed at her mother with a look of admiration in her face.

"It would, Mother, if such careful hands as yours could see to it," she averred.

Mollie's face seemed to shine with an inner light as she replied:

"If God can place such beauty before us, we certainly should be able to enjoy it and scatter it around. We can best do this by thinking good thoughts, doing good deeds, and living our lives in keeping with Christ's teachings. I was reading a Scripture verse the other day that appealed to me very much. It read something like this, '*But the path of the just is as the shinning light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*' You can almost tell by the expression on a person's face whether or not they're living close to God. If

they have Divine love in their heart, they can't help radiating cheerfulness and good will."

"Oh, Mother, you possess such a knack for saying things. I wish that I were blessed with your wisdom."

"How anyone can gaze upon the great beauty of nature and deny His power is more than I can understand," Mollie went on. "He has demonstrated to us in so many ways His power over the flesh," she stooped to inhale the perfume of a bright red rose. "I wish Tom were home. He loves roses."

"I'm glad that you love flowers, Mother, for I believe they've made your life beautiful."

"All good things come from God, dear, and all we need to do is to make ourselves acceptable in His sight." She kept moving from flower to flower, examining each minutely. "I must call to see Grandma Hildebrandt and take her a bouquet of nasturtiums. Maybe mine are the first to bloom this year."

"Do, Mother," said Dolores, with sympathy in her face. "She's such a dear old soul!"

Mollie shook her head sadly.

"I'm afraid that she won't be with us much longer now that Jimmies's gone . . . She has grieved so much. We've exchanged plants and slips so long, I'd sure miss her."

"Marian says that she's so wonderful, taking up her cross and bearing it so bravely."

"Marian is taking care of her, I reckon. Did you ever see such a woman? Surely if there ever was a Christian, it's she," her mother declared.

Mollie entered the house, placed some flowers in a vase, and started to prepare lunch.

Dolores came in immediately after her and said:

"I must look over this literature that the pastor handed me. He is organizing a department for recreation. He seems to think that the way to hold our young people to the church

is to make it so interesting for them that they can't keep away. He's going to try to raise funds to build a gym."

"I do hope these new experiments will prove to be practical and will work out," the mother replied.

While busy preparing the noonday meal, they started discussing the pastor again.

"I like the way he extends the invitation each Sunday," Mollie said, placing the buns in the oven to warm. "He always steps forth like he was expecting some one to answer his summons too. Seven Corners is fortunate to have such a man for a pastor, and I trust that he'll remain with us."

Once the plates were laid, Dolores dropped into a chair and became deeply absorbed in her reading.

"Oh, this is such a splendid plan that he's sponsoring, Mother!" she averred. "We can do wonderful things for our young people by putting forth a little effort."

Her mother smiled and said:

"I understand Brother Cheltenham has been out helping Jim Smith plow corn. Jim's been down with rheumatism, and his family almost destitute. It was such a fine thing for him to do."

"It doesn't seem to make much difference to him whether folks are rich or poor, he treats all alike," Dolores averred.

Mollie took the buns from the stove and wrapped them in a tea towel.

"That's the Christian's way. Too bad there are not more people in the world like him."

"He has asked me to assist him in this new work. He wants me to take charge of the girls."

Mollie threw herself down into a chair near her daughter and said confidentially:

"I've observed how interested you appear to be in this young man and his work, Dolores, and I wondered if you weren't falling in love with him?"

Dolores flushed slightly, and tucked her head for a moment. She and her mother had always confided in each other.

"I'm afraid that I am, Mother," she confessed. "I have never met anyone before who impressed me as he has. Why, I even dream of him!"

Mollie shook her head sadly.

"I'm sorry, dear, for what I have to tell you won't be pleasant news for your ears. Abigail says that he is engaged to some girl he met at college. I just wanted to warn you."

Dolores' face underwent a quick change. This bit of news obviously upset her greatly.

"Engaged?" she gasped. Then, quickly recovering herself, she added: "Quite possible, of course, why didn't I think of it before? I'm glad that you've told me this, Mother. It may save me some heartache later on."

Dolores was busy the next few days making plans and getting the girls together. Two rooms in the church basement had been turned over to her for social meetings, and a date set for the initial gathering.

\* \* \*

A week later, a tense excitement pervaded the social rooms as the pastor rose to speak.

"This is no easy task that I'm going to assign you," he began with considerable earnestness in his voice. "But one which will require tact and skill. Nevertheless, it will mean the personal enrichment of each one of you."

The youngsters uttered a squeal of rapture. They were embarked upon the most exciting venture of their young lives.

"Now, here is the plan," he went on. "It is our desire to win as many new members as possible for the recreational department of the Church School. Each of you pick out two people whom you wish especially to belong and do little things to attract them; for instance, endeavor to learn the date of their birthday and send them greeting cards. When

they're sick do little acts of kindness for them, and when they're absent from church school, send them a card telling them that you missed them. Sign all communications merely 'Friendship Pal,' and let the sender's name remain a mystery. I have friendship buttons which I'll award to all those who are successful in gaining two new members for the department. Let us know when you have reached your goal."

The youngsters yelled with delight.

Getting the youngsters out to the meetings was a task at first, but once they attended, they came again; they liked it. Vane wished especially to draw the older ones who would most likely be attracted to the resort. If he could secure their aid in combating Parker, he felt that it would help more than anything else. He tried to instill into them a desire for spiritual betterment, and to encourage idealistic living.

The first few days of the department's existence, they organized baseball teams, and encouraged athletic sports of all kinds. The youngsters went in for it with great zeal and were obviously having the time of their lives.

Dolores, the second week, arranged an outdoor affair for the girls at the farm home of one of the members. A truck load of noisy youngsters went out from town, and when they were all assembled there, they were told that they might do whatever they wished; go on a hike, climb trees, or anything they chose. The girls, their faces all aglow with interest, yelled and whooped with delight. All day long, they laughed and raced. A spirit of friendly understanding was cultivated, and they were drawn more sympathetically toward one another.

By the time summer had ended, the new department was functioning perfectly. Vane looked on with pleasure at the success of his efforts. The emotional life of the young people, he observed, was stimulated to a high degree of intensity. To lift these youngsters out of their present environment, to help them to keep their minds trained on

things that were worth while and help to make them useful men and women, this was his chief desire. He felt that if wholesome recreation was provided within the church, they wouldn't seek it elsewhere.

The new department adopted the following resolution: *"Resolved, that we will strive for Christian principles, a strong character, a healthy mind and body, a clean town in which to live, and to seek to win other youth to a knowledge of Jesus Christ as their personal Savior."*

With the coming of cooler weather it was necessary to change the routine. Indoor exercises were planned, and Dolores gave a program each week consisting of musical numbers, readings, and talks. Much new talent was developed, and a keen interest shown. She had taken a class of piano pupils, and gave instruction one day a week free of charge.

The programs were a huge success, and other churches hearing of the plan, adopted it. It was a means of keeping the young people interested in the affairs of the church, and their minds off such places as the resort.

"Things are beginning to hum!" said Marian Andrews to Mollie Blake.

"Yes, did you ever see anything like it?" replied Mollie, her eyes alight with interest. "We might have tried something like this years ago with success."

"Huh!" ejaculated Marian in her characteristic manner. "We never thought of it. Doesn't it beat all how a wide-awake man like Brother Cheltenham had to come along and wake us all up? His mind is busy continually thinking up something new. The children seem to have taken on new spirit, they're not as restless as they used to be."

Saturday, preceding Rally Day, the Recreational Department marched the streets led by the town band. The parade was quite colorful. Wearing caps, made from many different colors of crepe paper upon which was printed, "*Rally Day,*"

in large letters, the youngsters carried banners advertising the many different departments of the Church School. They attracted much attention, and the following Sunday, the church was filled with people. An interesting program was given by the children and considerable talent exhibited.

Vane stressed the importance of young people keeping their minds and hearts clean; of showing love and good will toward one another, and obeying God's commandments. He talked to them of their future, how, some day, they would be required to take their place in the world and conduct the affairs of the nation.

"Equip yourselves to fight the battles of life; to defend such principles as truth and honor." He warned them against being led away from their ideals by evil minded people who sought to destroy all the good in the world and replace it with evil. "Have a mind and will of your own," he emphasized. "Set a goal for yourselves and don't stop until you reach it."

So attentive were the young people, there wasn't even a whisper during his talk. The day was a long-to-be remembered one by the members of the new department.

## 14

VANE, seated at a table in one of the rooms of the church, fell into deep reflection. Looking back over the past few weeks, reviewing the work of the new department, he was well satisfied with the progress that they had made. He was proud of the young people, they were as fine a bunch of youngsters as one could find anywhere.

Thrown in almost daily contact with Dolores, he felt a strange pull of the heart toward her. Was it love? It was so different from anything he had ever felt for Maxine. He knew now that he had never really loved her. She was a good girl, but in no way suited for a minister's wife. He realized that she would be more of a hindrance than a help to him in his work. He dreaded the task of telling her as much, but felt that it was the only honorable thing to do.

While busy with his thoughts, the door suddenly flew open and Dolores, her cheeks red, her blue eyes enormous and shining, stood before him. He couldn't recall ever seeing her look better than she did this morning. He could tell by the look in her face that she was surprised to find him there at that hour of the day.

"I beg pardon!" she said cheerily. "I expected to find this place deserted. I came for a book that I left here last evening." She leaned against a table and eyed him for a moment.

"I'm glad you came," he said earnestly. "I have just been thinking about the work we have done here. I am quite satisfied with the results so far."

She sat down in the proffered chair and said:

"I was just telling mother this morning that those youngsters had exceeded my expectations."

Vane knew that a great deal of the credit was due her. She had worked earnestly and indefatigably.

"You have proved yourself to be an able social worker, Dolores. I want to thank you for the help that you have given me."

"I have enjoyed it a lot, Brother Cheltenham, but I fear that I will have to hand in my resignation. I have other plans for the future."

Her words pierced him like a knife.

"Surely you can't mean it," he said quickly. "You have done wonderful things for those girls. They will miss you. What is this new work, Dolores?"

"I am going to do some work for the State Department of Research," she explained.

"I wish you would reconsider the matter and remain here," he said, his voice pleading.

"Impossible, I'm afraid. You have the work here so well in hand, you won't need me."

He studied her for a moment. He didn't believe that she was telling him her real reason for resigning as his assistant, but was withholding something from him. She was so capable, so qualified in every way for the work, he realized that it would be impossible to find one who could take her place.

"You can't know how sorry I am to hear this, Dolores," he said, gravely. "What will the girls think about it?"

"Oh, they'll soon get used to a new leader. Youngsters don't worry like we older people."

He had to call forth all his will power to keep from telling her right then and there that he loved her—that he wanted her with him always, but he couldn't do so dishonorable a thing while engaged to Maxine.

It was a bright day, and November sunlight streamed in at the window in a golden flood.

Dolores rose to her feet and rummaged through a drawer in the desk in search of a book.

Vane observed that she avoided his glance, and once he thought he detected a tear in her eye. A tempest was raging within him. Could it be possible that she loved him as much as he loved her, he reflected.

Dolores, having found the book she was searching for, said:

"I must be going now, Brother Cheltenham. I'll speak to one of the teachers and see if they won't help you out here."

"Thanks, Dolores, that is kind of you. I'll appreciate it, I am sure. I wish you lots of success in your new work."

Vane wanted to say more, but his lips wouldn't move. He walked to the window and watched her as far as he could see her. He felt torn with a sense of loss. Well, there was nothing to do but take it, he reflected, and grabbing his hat he went home and locked himself in his study.

He took up a book and tried to read, but found it impossible to concentrate on what he was reading. Dolores' sudden decision to leave him had upset him greatly. Restless, he paced the floor.

Finally, throwing himself down at his desk, he decided to write to Maxine. He would be perfectly frank with her and tell her how impossible it would be for him to marry her while loving another woman. Once a page was written, he read it and tore it into shreds. It sounded so shallow, he thought. He decided to go and talk to her personally about it; it wasn't so cowardly.

When Mrs. Moss called him to lunch, he was in a depressed mood, but a visit with his landlady always did him good.

"Beautiful day, Brother Cheltenham," she said. "Have you been for a walk?"

"Yes, it's great outdoors, Mrs. Moss," he said, trying his best to be cheerful. "Let's hope it doesn't turn cold until Christmas."

"I was in to see Mrs. Hopewell this morning," Mrs. Moss said. "She's been down in bed with influenza, but she's improving right along."

"I must drop in to see her," Vane said. "I have been neglecting my calls."

"Do, Brother Cheltenham, it will please her a lot."

When the meal was finished, Vane returned to his study.

A sharp rap at the door brought him to his feet with a start. When he opened the door, he found himself face to face with Mrs. Doolittle who stood there with a look of anguish in her face. He sensed that there was something wrong, so he invited her in and urged her to be seated.

"The family all well, Mrs. Doolittle?" he asked, hoping to put her at ease.

She tucked her head for a moment, and Vane could see that she was greatly upset over something. His heart went out to her in deep sympathy.

"Oh, Brother Cheltenham!" she sobbed. "I'm in trouble, an' you must he'p me! I came to see you 'bout Angeline, she's tuck to goin' to them thar dances at the resort, an' thar ain't no stoppin' her. That woman comes a-drivin' up in her car, an' the child jest will go in spite o' us." Her steely eyes gleamed with an insane look. Brokenly, and pausing at intervals to control her voice, she gave him all the details.

Vane had bowed his head. He knew that she was a good woman, and he was touched by her grief. He recalled his visit to her home when the husband and father had been so cold and inhospitable.

"I'm very sorry to hear this, Mrs. Doolittle," he said fervently. "Allowing your daughter to frequent such a place as

that is just like tossing a young lamb into a den of wolves. We must find some way to stop it."

She eyed him with all gravity and seriousness.

"Hit's all Ezra's fault, I reckon. He's driv' her to hit by never 'lowin' her to go anywhar. She openly defies him now an' goes in spite o' his rarin'. That man is jest too stubborn to eat. If he had a-listened to me, this wouldn't have happened." She kept running her fingers through her hair nervously.

The sadness in Vane's face deepened as he replied:

"I must see Ezra and have a talk with him."

"It won't do a bit o' good, I'm a-feared," she said, her voice taking on spirit. "I've been a-tryin fer' years to make that man see the difference 'tween black an' white, an' all I got to show fer hit is a few gray hairs."

Vane drummed thoughtfully on the table.

"It's only natural for a child her age to want to go places," he said firmly. "I was afraid that unless she was allowed to go along with the rest that it would have an evil effect upon her. She's rebellious."

The woman's muscles twitched.

"I've prayed, an' I've done 'bout ever' thing else, sir, hopin' that Ezra would change his ways, but I reckon hit ain't in him."

"Has he ever really been converted?" Vane inquired.

"He's never had his name on a church roll in his life. I've b'longed fer years. I've allus felt that parents a-raisin' children should be active members of a church, an' contribute some-thin' t'ward thar support."

Vane wondered if it would be possible to reach the man's heart for this good woman's sake. He promised her that he would talk to her husband and daughter, and see what he could do.

"My heart is breakin' an' I jest felt that I had to talk to someone, sir," she half sobbed as she went out the door.

"What next!" Vane muttered when she had gone. "Those people at the resort are causing no end of trouble."

He decided that the best way to forget his own troubles was to bury himself in those of others, so an hour later, he located Ezra in his shop. The place smelled of coal smoke and decay. Ezra, he understood, was a competent blacksmith, and did his work well.

"How-do-you-do, Ezra!" he said, offering his hand.

"Howd'y," replied Ezra, ignoring the proffered hand. His tone was almost a snarl.

Vane, seeing the inhospitable look in his eyes, said, "I'd like to talk to you, Ezra, if you're not too busy."

Ezra stopped for a moment and eyed him without saying a word.

"I wish to talk to you about your daughter who I understand has been attending dances at the resort," Vane added, looking straight into his eyes.

Ezra's gray eyes, under the sweep of gray hair, flashed fury. He twitched nervously at his suspenders, readjusted his leather apron, then casting a malevolent glance toward his visitor, fell to work upon the anvil, making every blow tell with marked precision.

Vane could see that he had insulted the man by prying into his personal affairs. A wave of warmhearted sympathy rushed over him. He decided that if he got next to him, he'd have to use a different method.

"We would like to have Angeline in our Recreational Department," he said.

Ezra grinned sheepishly.

"That's a long soundin' name you've got fer hit, ain't hit?" he said, displaying cynicism. He was struck with a spell of coughing which elicited a few oaths.

"I reckon hit ain't any o' yore business what my daughter does," he finally added. He knitted his brows together and scowled at the pastor.

The old gentleman showed an irascibility that was new to Vane. He watched the wrinkles gather and deepen about the corners of his eyes, and all his suavity left him. He decided that he'd use force if necessary to open his eyes for him.

"Look here, Erza, for once in your life you're going to listen," he said, laying a peremptory hand on his shoulder. "You forbade your daughter coming to church, didn't you? Now you allow her to frequent such places as the resort. To be with such people at this impressionable age will be the ruination of her."

Ezra roared like a lion, seeking all the time to free himself of the hold Vane had on his arm. He cursed and swore, and fairly foamed at the mouth.

"Now look here, Ezra, you're making a perfect fool out of yourself," said Vane in a conciliatory manner. "I came here to talk to you, to help you. You've allowed your mind to rot, and your heart to grow hard. You need God's comforting love to soothe you. You've just got to listen to me for your family's sake!"

Ezra seemed to calm down under the pastor's words.

"I ain't had nothin' to do with Angeline a-goin' to the resort," he said owlishly.

"You've had everything to do with it, Ezra!" Vane returned. "Instead of permitting your daughter to go along with the rest of her friends to church functions, your prejudice has kept her at home. Instead of going yourself, you've stayed here harboring hate in your heart. You've been poisoning your family with something far worse than a drug. If anything happens to your daughter, you can take the blame upon your own shoulders. It'll be because of your prejudice, your selfish-

ness!" He did not spare the man, but spoke frankly what was in his mind.

Ezra snorted around awhile, glared at him for a moment, then his expression changed. His eyes assumed a more tender look.

Vane could see that he was about to melt, and down in his heart, he pitied him.

"One thing more, Ezra," he added. "If this isn't stopped, and stopped at once, your daughter will be dragged down into the very depths of sin. Wake up! She needs you worse than she ever needed anything in her life!"

Ezra coughed and cleared his throat.

Vane, understanding human nature like he did, knew instinctively what the man was suffering, and how hard it was for him to give in.

Several moments passed without either of them speaking.

"Come, Ezra, let's work this thing out together," he pleaded. "Admit that you need God! He will help you; He will comfort your heart if you'll let him! Shall we pray together?"

Ezra's spirit softened under his friendliness. He could see that the cords that had held such bitterness in the old man's heart were about to break, to yield to human companionship and love.

Ezra moved closer, and he knew he was soon to hear his decision.

"Brother Cheltenham," he began, fairly mopping his partly bald head. "I ain't a-wantin' to be stubborn, I jest can't he'p hit," his voice trailed off into incoherent mutterings. Then, getting hold of himself again, he blew his nose and added: "If you don't mind, I wish you'd pray fer me—an' for Angeline!" he fell to his knees murmuring inarticulate pleas.

Van's heart went out to him in a flood of sympathy. There was no floor in the shop, just the bare ground, but he knelt

beside Ezra and prayed an earnest, sincere prayer for the man's soul and his errant daughter.

When the prayer was finished, Ezra rose to his feet and said in a pleading voice:

"If you could git my daughter to quit goin' to the resort, I'd be mighty happy. Her Ma an' I hev worried ourselves sick 'bout hit. I know I'm jest an' old reprobate, an' mighty stubborn, but I can't he'p hit. I war borned that way."

Vane's heart took a queer bounding leap. There was nothing that he enjoyed more than bringing a sinner to repentance. He made the old gentleman promise that he would repent and read his Bible.

"There's nothing so good for all of us, Ezra, as confession and repentance," he said. "We need to humble ourselves before the throne of God often and admit our failures. '*He will keep thee in perfect peace whose mind is staid on thee;*'" he quoted. "There is comfort in that."

"I reckon you're right," said Ezra,

Before leaving, Vane went into the house, and had a long talk with Ezra's wife and daughter. Angeline received him with such warmth that his heart went out to her immediately. Before half an hour had elapsed, she was revealing to him the innermost things of her life.

"I know that you think I'm bad 'cause I went to the resort," she said humbly. "Dad wouldn't 'low me to go anywhar else, so I jest thought I'd fool him onct and go whar I pleased."

Vane warned her of the danger that might befall her at the resort, and told her that he had a place for her in his new department. He observed that a new light came into her eyes, and he felt no uneasiness over her future. He knew that what she craved was friends and companionship, and knew that she'd find it in the church organizations.

CONDITIONS throughout the country didn't improve, farm prices were down to rock bottom, and the people were compelled to borrow heavily to meet their obligations. Half the population of Seven Corners were idle, and the resort proved to be a drawing card for men with nothing to do. Throngs of them loitered about the place, gossiping, and discussing the financial condition of the country.

Frank Devins, at the Farmers National, had refused to cooperate with the other bank in making small loans to tide the people over. Many thought his motive for such action was to cause a severe strain on the First National and force them to close their doors.

Meanwhile, Andrews, public spirited man that he was, continued to deal out small amounts to enable the people to keep going until they could get on their feet. He visualized that unless immediate help was given, there would be a complete break down. This caused a heavy drain upon the bank, and they were compelled to place some restrictions on loans.

There had been a number of bank failures in the county recently, and rumors got about that the First National in Seven Corners was on the verge of closing its doors.

Public opinion is easily turned against a man, even though he has devoted his entire life to public welfare. Gossip had it that Andrews had long been using the people to his own advantage; to fatten his own wallet. They called particular attention to the fine home that he possessed; the luxury in which he lived. All this, they shouted, he had taken from

the poor people. In a moment of madness, they seemed to forget his philanthropy, his generosity, his devotion to his community, and thought only of themselves.

Will Blake and a few others did everything they could to stop the unfortunate gossip, but to no avail. It was rumored that the bank examiners had been seen in Andrews bank and the people started a run on the First National.

When Vane, who happened to be moseying down the street that bright morning, saw what was happening, he could hardly believe his eyes.

"What can they be thinking?" he gasped, as he spied swarms of people crowding into the door of the bank, crowding, pushing, and jostling each other. "They've started a run on the bank! How could they do it?" he muttered to himself. He was trying to check the passions that surged through him and which threatened to overwhelm him. Had the people lost their senses completely? he wondered.

Eben Kyle, his gray hair blowing in the wind, came hurrying down the street. Sighting Vane, he said:

"Devins and Parker have got in their dirty work at last! Sylvester has saved others, himself he cannot save!" His voice was deep with emotion.

Vane didn't tell him of the appalling conviction that gripped him at that moment that there was a conspiracy already in operation not only to destroy such men as Andrews, but the church as well. A wave of disgust swept over him. Such ingratitude!

When he spied members of his congregation in the crowd, his eyes widened.

Edging up to Fred Wolters, he said:

"What do you people mean by taking such action as this? Where is it going to get you?"

"We've been warned that unless we withdraw, our funds will be lost," Wolters replied.

"I'm afraid that you've been misinformed," Vane returned. "The people have lost faith in Andrews. They've gone mad!"

Vane crowded into the bank, and when he caught sight of Andrews, he was thunderstruck. His brow was furrowed, the tired lines in his face greatly accentuated. To see his good friend in such difficulties and not be able to do anything to help him, was appalling. If he had done what he most wanted to do, he'd have told the whole gang just what he thought of them. His heart beat with trepidation as he eyed the merciless mob.

Andrews, taking in the scene with one long comprehensive glance, mounted a table that stood in the lobby of the bank, waved his hands frantically and yelled:

"Friends, you must hear me!"

"Quiet, please!" Andrews yelled.

The crowd, at first, seemed reluctant to obey his command, but when his voice rose above all the rest, and they saw him standing there, his eyes flashing fire, they suddenly quieted down.

"Friends!" he began, with deep emotion in his voice. "I have been at the head of this bank for twenty-five years. During that time, I have tried to place your interests above my own. I have worked for your welfare, and there's not one of you but what I have helped in some way. You all understand the serious condition that our country is in at the present time. Heavy demands have been made on this bank; upon all banks for that matter. Malicious gossip has been circulated that this institution is not sound. I'll admit that we've been compelled to make loans, but all for your benefit; to keep some of you from losing the roof from over your heads. Now, friends, for years, you have come to me for advice. A great many of you I have known since you were in knee breeches. You've always had confidence in me, now show me your loyalty! You have one of two choices to make, my

friends, and you haven't long to decide which it's to be. Either withdraw your funds and force us to close our doors which will shut off any further aid to the community from this direction, or cooperate by leaving your money in our hands and help us in our great struggle to keep going. You are all citizens of this community, and you should feel an interest in the welfare of your fellowmen. I guarantee you, that if you'll leave your funds with us, they will be safeguarded."

There was silence for a moment. Then one of the mob yelled: "We want our money!" Others took it up until the cry was general.

A woman yelled something obscene in Andrews's direction.

"How did you get that fine home of yours if you've been square with us?" A big Irishman yelled. "We want our money, and we're going to stay here until we get it!"

"Just listen to that!" yelled Will Blake, nudging Vane. "I recall one time when Sylvester financed an operation for that man's wife. If he had refused, God only knows what would have been the consequences, yet he can stand there and hurl abuse at him."

As Vane watched the hate-inspired mob, he clenched his hands nervously. Blind, blistering rage surged through him. He wanted to get in the fight. He saw Andrews pale and shocked, and he shuddered.

The mob became more insistent, jamming and crowding each other until it became a regular riot. When Andrews saw that the people were beyond control, he ordered Jim Lawson, the cashier, to start paying.

"Pay to the last dollars, Jim," he ordered.

The cashier's window went up, and there was a mad rush in that direction. Crowding and pushing each other, the people struggled to get in line.

The marshall and two deputies tried to keep the line intact, but the people seemed to have lost all control of themselves.

When all the available funds were exhausted, Andrews said:  
"We've paid all that we can for to-day, but I guarantee you that not one of you shall lose a nickel."

The crowd hurled noisy invectives at him. Some refused to leave the bank, and the officers had to evict them. Once the lobby was clear of people, the doors were locked to prevent any further outbreak. The crowd lingered in the street in front of the building in a threatening mood.

Andrews threw himself down into a chair obviously exhausted. He looked like he might be on the verge of collapse.

"Well," said Lawson dejectedly, "What do you think of it?"  
Andrews face was as white as marble.

"Miserable feeling, Jim, when you've given your best and reap such ingratitude! I'm a badly disillusioned man!"

Lawson rose and paced the floor.

"Devins is to blame for this, and mind what I tell you, he'll suffer for it!" he said in a threatening manner.

Andrews rose to his feet and strode up and down the room restlessly.

"I just hate to face my wife and children after what has happened!" he said vehemently. "My generosity has got the best of me. I've robbed my own family to help others, and this is my compensation!"

"We've got to fight, and fight hard!" Lawson said in a strained, uneven voice. "Ignorant minds and tongues can do more damage than guns."

The two men spent considerable time with the Examiners going over the books, and they were soon convinced that there was nothing to do but close the doors and turn things over to the State Department.

When the Examiners had left for the night, Andrews turned to Lawson and said:

"I'm going to reopen this bank, Jim, if it takes everything that I possess!"

The men sat for a long while obviously trying to vision a way out of their difficulties. Andrews was the first to break the silence.

"You'd better go on home, Jim, Mary will be looking for you. I'm going to stay here a while to think things over."

Lawson eyed his employer curiously.

"I'm in no hurry, Sylvester," he said with a shadow of apprehension in his eyes.

Andrews was determined: "I must insist upon you going, Jim. I can think this thing out better alone."

Lawson put on his hat and coat and left very reluctantly. On his way home, he stopped at the Andrews residence and gave Marian all the details.

Left alone, Andrews paced the floor with a confused look in his face, and when his wife entered the room, he stared at her without recognition.

"Sylvester!" she said, without a break in her voice. "What are you doing here so late? We feared that something had happened to you."

Andrews eyed his wife pitifully for a moment, then threw himself down at his desk and placed his head in his hands.

"My friends have turned me down, Marian! I'm a broken man!"

Marian raised her head courageously.

"Well, you're going to take it standing up, aren't you? Such ingratitude hurts, Sylvester, I know that, but there's nothing to do but take it."

"Then you know all?" he said, raising his head.  
She nodded.

"I've tried so hard to steer my people through this depression, and if it hadn't been for my enemies working against me, I'd have succeeded. I bear no ill will toward my depositors for I know that they've been the victims of lying tongues. No one else will look after their welfare as I have done. It breaks my heart, Marian, to see my old friends and neighbors lose confidence in me.

Marian Andrews, trying her best to control the emotions that were surging through her, said:

"You still have your family, Sylvester. We know how splendid you've been."

He raised his eyes to her and said soberly:

"This means, Marian, that we must sell the roof from over our children's head; the home they love so well!"

Marian's eyes filled, and she bit her lip thoughtfully for a moment.

"Well, as long as there's no disgrace connected with it, we can stand it. Such things happen every day. What would hurt us the most would be to have you lose your character; do dishonorable things."

"Rumor has me painted that color now," he said sadly.

"Yes, but there are a few intelligent people who'll never believe it," she said spiritedly.

Andrews rose and placed his hand affectionately upon his wife's shoulder.

"You've been a brave woman, Marian, a splendid wife and helper. It's a shame to have to go back and start all over again."

"It will be hard for the children, but they must be made to see that this is no fault of yours. I know your heart, Sylvester, and know that it's good. Nothing could shake my faith in you!"

Andrews' face brightened a trifle.

"God bless you, dear, you give me strength," he said tenderly. "Before you came, Marian, all the horror that anyone could imagine seemed to be sweeping over me. I had you and the children pictured as paupers, but you've opened my eyes. These things, after all, are just material. Spiritual things are what count." They stood for a few moments with their arms about each other.

"It won't be bad, Sylvester," she said hopefully. "When we cease to build, we slump and deteriorate. What finer thing could you have done than give yourself to your community? That's the Christian spirit, I admire you for it!"

"It's going to be awful hard to give up the old home!" he muttered.

"Oh, I don't know, Sylvester," she spoke up quickly. "A house doesn't make a home. One can be happy anywhere if one will try. We'll build up this community yet even though it is on the downward grade."

"Such a spirit!" he exclaimed.

That Marian Andrews had plenty of courage, grit and determination was quite obvious.

"There's work to be done, Sylvester," she said, taking his arm in her own. "And I am the happiest when I'm doing something. In the crowning days of our triumphs, we stood together, and now in time of reverses, we'll do the same. Come, dear, we're going home. The children are waiting for us."

He took his hat and accompanied her.

\* \* \*

When morning came, Sylvester Andrews had recovered his spirits and self-possession. The examiners placed a sign on the door of the First National, reading: "*CLOSED TEMPORARILY UNTIL REORGANIZATION PLANS ARE COMPLETED.*"

Securing space in a real estate office next door to the bank, Andrews received a steady stream of callers. Many from out in the hills who had just heard the news, swarmed into town to look after their interests.

In answer to all questions, Andrews gave answers with kindness, offering a ray of encouragement to all. Some believed him while others doubted. A great many people, when it comes to their money, mistrust their very best friends. Being the big man that he was, Andrews met their fears by offering his personal help.

Vane, who had been trying since the day before, to get in touch with his old friend, finally forced his way into his presence. To see him so composed, so like his natural self, was a big surprise. His own mind had been so overwrought over the happenings of the previous day, he had scarcely closed his eyes during the night.

He wrung Andrews hand warmly and said:

"I'm dreadfully sorry to see this trouble come to you, my good friend. You don't deserve it. Keep up your courage, we're not all down on you yet."

Andrews smiled faintly.

"May as well make the best of it, I reckon," he said resignedly. "It has been hard to see my old friends go back on me, but they didn't realize what they were doing. They were misled."

"No, Sylvester," he said, with a friendly pat on the shoulder. "They haven't been trained in judgment. They are going to learn a great lesson, and I trust that through it all, they will gain some wisdom."

Andrews' shoulders moved restlessly.

"False rumors caused the run on the bank."

"Of course," Vane agreed. "But this fight isn't over yet, Brother Andrews. But, you've come out of it with a clean character, and that's a great victory."

"Thanks, indeed, Brother Cheltenham. My conscience is clear."

Within a few weeks a deal was negotiated between Andrews and a real estate firm in Hillsboro whereby his home in Seven Corners was transferred to a new owner for a good substantial sum which was to go toward liquidating the defunct bank. The Andrews family had rented a cottage, and were preparing to move into their new quarters.

## 16

“COME, children, I have something to tell you,” said the soft voice of Marian Andrews. She seated herself in a comfortable rocking chair in the dining room, and motioned her two daughters to a seat close by. Her eyes were serious.

Phyllis and Eloise complied with their mother’s request with a big question mark in their eyes.

“You children have no doubt wondered why it is necessary for us to sell our home here and move into a rented house,” she began. “In order to explain the matter fully, it will be necessary to go back a few years and start at the beginning.” She heaved a deep sigh, then continued: “When your father and I were married, he didn’t have a dollar to his name. But he was honest and conscientious, and a man of strong character. When we moved to this place, there was just a small two-room house where this one now stands. Your father was thrifty and knew the value of a dollar, and we progressed. When he started working at the bank, he had no idea of ever being its president. He was just an underpaid clerk. We found it quite difficult to make ends meet. In those days we got along with just the bare necessities of life in order to be able to contribute something toward the church and the town’s progress. Your father always had the people’s interest at heart. He never refused an honest man a loan. When you children came, you brought us much happiness but also more responsibility. Watching you grow, planning for your future, making the proper home atmosphere for you and

bringing you up in the Christian way of life were the things we considered of most importance. We didn't crave riches, but your father prospered in spite of himself. Judge Longworth, who was president of the bank at that time, liked your father. He was quick to detect his untiring interest in the affairs of the institution. When an opening came, he made him the cashier, and upon his death, your father succeeded him.

"Now, children, what I wish to impress upon your mind is this: Your father has devoted all these years to the growth and the welfare of this community; and he has helped hundreds of people out of their difficulties. His generosity has caused our financial collapse. In a moment of economic stress, the people have turned against him; their minds poisoned by malicious gossip originating at Parker's Resort. They seem to have forgotten all that he has done for them. He made loans to tide the people over and accepted poor collateral, now we must sell our home in order to liquidate the bank. We must start all over again."

Phyllis and Eloise were both laughing and crying at times. "Strange that I didn't know all this before," said Phyllis.

"Your father never believed in talking business before you children," the mother replied. "He always figured that you'd hear plenty of that when you grew up."

"I know, now, why so many of the youngsters have been sneering, and hurling insults at me on the street," Eloise said.

Marian bit her lip for a moment as though her daughter's words had hurt her. She rose and walked to the window and stood gazing out over the hills, then she returned to the children again and said:

"What you must keep in mind, children, is this: There is no disgrace connected with your father's collapse. It is no fault of his. He has been everything that a husband and father could be; loyal to his town, to his people, and to his

family. And while we've met with reverses, they will only be temporary. The people who have caused this will be the ones who will suffer most."

"I met Mrs. Devins and Mrs. Hathaway on the street yesterday, but they didn't appear to know me," said Phyllis.

"Snubbed you, eh?" said Marian, her eyes flashing. "Well, we can still hold up our heads, children. It's no disgrace to be poor, besides, if riches affected me like it does some people, I'd rather die in rags."

"I'm glad that you've told us everything, Mother," said Phyllis. "I'll show father what a true daughter is like."

"Yes, children, show your mettle," the mother enjoined. "Your father is deeply grieved over this, but we must show him that we will stand by him."

The conversation was interrupted by a rap at the door. Phyllis, answering the summons, ushered in Mollie Blake.

Mollie's face was beaming with love and kindness as she said:

"Marian, dear, I heard that you were getting ready to move, and I knew just how you'd feel." She wiped away a tear and continued: "There are a few of us left who know the Andrews family for their real worth, and I came to bring you my love and sympathy." She pulled off her black coat and scarf and handed them to Phyllis. . . .

There had always been a strong bond of sympathy between the two women and they wandered into the living room where they could talk confidentially. Marian strove to be brave.

"Thank you, Mollie, I never doubted you for one moment, and I appreciate your call very much. It has been quite a jolt, but we'll get over it, I think."

"Of course, you will, and I want you to know that it'll make no difference in our friendship, Marian. The only thorn in my heart is the mean scheme that was contrived to ruin a

good man. Devins is responsible for it. He's the meanest man in Seven Corners!"

"And why should he feel toward us like he does? When they first came here, I did everything that I could to help his wife get acquainted."

Mollie shook her head sadly.

"They're queer people. Their ideals and conception of life render them unfit companions for people who make any pretense of being real and substantial. Too many people have come here trying to change us, to make us over, but they haven't had much luck. What Leta Devins envies about you the most, Marian, is your Christianity—your gentleness, your willingness to reach out and help everyone with whom you come in contact."

"My children have been snubbed and insulted for days now by different ones, and I'll tell you, Mollie, it gets under one's skin!"

"Such ignorance!" Mollie said quickly. "Pay no attention to it!"

"I'm so glad to have someone to talk to. I've been trying to conceal my real feelings from Sylvester and the children. But to break up and leave this old place is no easy matter. Why, every tree and shrub about the place has been planted under my direction."

"I know, I know, Marian," Mollie nodded sympathetically.

"It takes a heap o' livin' in a house to make it a home. To disturb the cribs where my babies slept, and surrender this house that love built to strangers is gnawing at my heart. We've spent so many happy evenings here. I was just thinking this morning of the time that Phyllis was down with pneumonia and we thought every day would be her last. I prayed so fervently that God would spare her life, and He did. I have been praying and hoping that possibly He would intervene to save us this move, but I guess it isn't His will."

"This is a time when your strength—your faith is being put to the test, Marian. Hope and pray!" Mollie said fervently.

"This has been a great jolt to Sylvester, that's why I must keep my courage.

"The people in this town seem to have gone mad. Will said last night he had never seen anything to equal it . . . I reckon the people have carried their money down to the Devins bank. I wonder if they'll fare any better under his management?"

"He'll gyp them out of the last cent they've got if they don't watch him," Marian averred.

"Well, you must keep up your faith and courage; you've always surpassed the rest of us in things like that, you know."

"Thanks for coming, Mollie, your visit was just what I needed!"

Vane stayed close by the family in their trying hour. He sensed the silent suffering the mother was enduring, and did everything he could to encourage and help her. He saw that although she was preparing to leave the old home and abandon herself to a merciless world, she still could cherish fine thoughts. There appeared to be no room in her heart for resentment. As she went about the place, supervising the moving, there was grace and poise in her every movement. She was an inspiration to them all. No one would have detected the sorrow that was in her heart.

Sylvester, returning for the last load that evening, found her at the west window, gazing out upon the landscape. The sun was taking a dip behind the hills, and was now only dimly visible.

Going toward her, he placed an arm about her.

"I think I know just how you feel, darling!" he said tenderly. "You're a brave woman, and it breaks my heart to see you make this move!"

Turning to him with the old love light shining in her eyes, she replied:

"Pshaw, Sylvester, it's not so bad! There is still plenty to live for. There's beauty everywhere, don't you think? All that we need to do is to keep our minds and hearts open. I love the view from this window . I've watched so many gorgeous sunsets from here."

His arms tightened about her, and he gazed into her face with a shadow of apprehension in his eyes.

"Will you ever be as happy anywhere, dear, as you've been here?"

She smiled faintly. "I'm sure we will, Sylvester. Life, after all, is just what we make it. When we really understand God, and grasp the true meaning of life, it doesn't make so much difference where we live. Didn't Christ die a cursed death on the tree, taking upon Himself our sins? Hasn't He borne our griefs and carried our sorrows that we might go free? And should not we be true to Him in faith and trust and service? We will carry on, Sylvester. The people here have never needed us as much as they do now."

"I admire your courage, brave woman!" he replied, his voice vibrant with a deeper note. "I've worried myself sick for fear the move would crush and humiliate you and the children."

"I've told the children everything. They understand. They feel the same way I do. As long as we have our health, and have each other, we still have a great deal to be thankful for."

Night came, and they were still there with their arms about each other.

"Let's go to our new home, Marian!" he said softly.

"And start our new beginning!" she replied.

VANE became more absorbed in his work than ever. He gave much of his time and thought to the recreational department. Miss Wilson, one of the high school teachers, had taken Dolores' place as his assistant. She was redheaded, wore spectacles, and was a very precise little person. She seemed to be adapted for the work, but he missed the companionship of Dolores dreadfully. He had seen her the day before out riding with young Harold Loomis, and he had heard that they were as good as engaged. Harold, he had observed, was a fine-looking boy, and had just completed an engineering course in college. They were well suited to each other, he thought.

Busy in his work, he had been wondering what had happened to his fiancee. Maxine's letters, of late, had been irregular, telling of dinners and parties that she had attended, without breathing a word of sentiment. He didn't care for he knew that whatever tender feelings he may have had for her at one time were dead. Her mother, he had been informed, had remarried, and they had gone to live in a very restricted residential section of St. Louis. He was glad for Maxine's sake, for he knew that she was tired of the library. Of late, he had been wondering if he hadn't better go and have a heart-to-heart talk with her. He knew now that the life he lived would never suit her — knew that her love for the world exceeded everything else, and he couldn't picture her as fitting into the pattern of a woman who could help carry the burdens of the whole community upon her shoulders. . . . He'd expect

his wife to bear him children; be a kind and loving mother, and help him conduct the affairs of the church. . . . She'd have to be a woman who could forget self, and devote her time to the welfare of others.

The next day, he received the following letter:

My dear Vane:

It is heartbreaking for me to tell you this, but I find that I no longer love you as much as a woman should love the man whom she is to marry, therefore I must ask for my freedom. I am sorry if this will bring you unhappiness. I feel that we were both too young to realize what we were doing. I shall look back at our many happy associations with great pleasure, and I trust that the future holds many good things in store for you. I shall always consider you one of my best friends.

With best wishes for your success and happiness, I am

Your very dear friend,

MAXINE.

His only comment upon reading the letter was, "It's for the best," and taking his pen in hand, he scribbled the following reply:

Dear Maxine:

The life that you would have to live as the wife of a minister would be a hard one, and would require a great deal of sacrifice. Willingly, I grant you your freedom. As for me, I simply couldn't be happy unless I were doing God's work; it is my calling. I love it. I trust, Maxine, that no matter what heights you may attain, that you will keep constantly in mind the One who makes everything possible. Honest, upright Christian living is the foundation for true happiness, and any diversion from it is liable to bring remorse. In time, the

glitter and glamor of the world will fade away into nothingness to make way for the things of the spirit. I shall always feel deeply grateful to you and your good mother for sheltering a poor, lonesome Bible student, at a time when he needed a home. My prayer is, that you will take advantage of your opportunities and talents, and mold them into a fine and useful life.

Sincerely,

VANE CHELTENHAM.

Vane had many fond recollections of his student days, and he felt that in breaking off with Maxine, he was losing a friend.

Unaccountably, his thoughts sped to Dolores. Too bad this didn't happen sooner, he reflected. He might have stood some chance with her. Now, he presumed, she was wrapped up in young Loomis. There didn't appear to be anything in store for him but work and sacrifice.

In a rather restless frame of mind, he put on his hat and overcoat, and walked to the Andrews home.

The Andrews family greeted him warmly.

"Our home isn't what it used to be, Brother Cheltenham," said Marian apologetically, "but I trust that you'll enjoy your visit just the same."

Vane eyed her interestedly.

"I notice that the Andrews hospitality and spirit is here," he returned.

Marian smiled. "Yes, trials exalt and strengthen us, they say."

Watching his hostess, Vane fell to studying her face. He sensed that the first few weeks hadn't been easy for her. Acustomed to a large house with modern conveniences, he knew that it had been hard to get used to cramped-up quarters.

"You folks have shown such a fine spirit in meeting the new conditions," he said. "It shows that you grasp the true significance of life."

"I've always heard that work was the best panacea for trouble, Brother Cheltenham. I keep busy and never allow myself to indulge in retrospection."

Sylvester Andrews placed a hand upon the pastor's shoulder and said:

"My wife refuses to become discouraged, Brother Cheltenham."

Vane smiled good naturedly.

"If more folks possessed that mental quality this old world would be a much happier place in which to live," he averred.

"Well, after all, we haven't much to complain about as long as we can keep our health and good spirits," Marian said spiritedly. "With God's hand guiding us, with so many things to enjoy, it would be quite trivial to allow a few material things to spoil our happiness."

"You're quite right, Mrs. Andrews," Vane replied. "Life doesn't consist in the abundance of material wealth that we possess, but in our human qualities — our ability to adapt ourselves to conditions no matter what they may be, and enjoy God's wonderful blessings!"

They chatted for a long while, and Vane left in good spirits. He always felt better after a visit with the Andrews family.

As the days passed, Vane threw himself into his work with renewed energy. He went into the homes of the most lowly with his message, and pleaded with the people to follow Christ. And he found about him so much helplessness, so much pity, that he forgot his own troubles, and as time went by, he developed an ever growing passion for souls.

## 18

DEVINS, surreptitiously, had schemed with a real estate firm in Hillsboro to purchase the Andrews residence, and once the property was transferred in his name, he lost no time moving in. Leta Devins, a dark-haired, blue-eyed little woman, with high social aspirations, was now the proud possessor of Marian Andrews' old home. She quickly assumed the attitude of a superior.

The Devins family were just nicely settled in their new home when news came out that the First National was going to reopen. This was a blow to Devins, who obviously felt that with Andrews out of the way, control of the financial interests were in his hands.

He returned home that night in an ill frame of mind.

"Oh, Frank," said his wife, greeting him warmly. "I'm having a bridge party tomorrow evening; I've invited all the people in town who are of any consequence. You must arrange to be home dear."

Devins, his face full of anger, said:

"You should ask me before doing these things. I don't care much for bridge!"

"But, Frank, now that we have this big house, you must surely know that I expect to entertain more lavishly than I have done before."

"Do your entertaining in the afternoon then," he growled. "I have enough to worry about without being bothered with bridge scores."

She stiffened, placed her hands on her hips, and said: "If we're going to live in this town, we should mix with the people. I don't like the attitude you assume toward them. Don't you think that it would be better to devote some of your time to the social affairs of the community?"

He threw his head back angrily and said in a rather matter-of-fact tone:

"I guess if we got along in Chicago, we can here."

"There is a vast difference, Frank, between Seven Corners and Chicago. Anything will go in the city, but not here!"

"It will if you put some power behind it," he retorted briskly.

"You seem to think that everything depends upon driving power. I'm of the opinion that your system isn't so popular in small towns. Out here people live together peacefully and happily, taking but little thought of sordid things. Haven't you observed the genuine interest the people take here in each other's welfare? We have a human element to reckon with here."

"Uh huh!" he grunted. "They take plenty of interest in one all right. About all I hear from the time I open the bank until I close is a tale of woe, but believe me, unless they can show some collateral, they're not getting any money at the Farmers National."

"Times are bad, Frank," his wife entreated. "Many people are destitute. They don't know which way to turn. They need someone to guide them."

"Some one to carry them, you mean."

"I have been told that there are a dozen families in town who are destitute. About all they have, I understand, is what the church gives them."

"Let the church take care of them," he drawled.

"Oh, you're just impossible!" she said angrily. "I can't do anything to please you any more. I've been marooned in this

town for three years with scarcely any friends at all, and you're responsible for it. You are gone the greater part of the time. Don't you think I ever get lonesome?" She threw herself down into a chair and burst into tears.

His wife's tears appeared to soften him a trifle, and he said in a rather conciliatory manner:

"Come now, don't cry! I'm sorry that I said what I did, but I've just heard some bad news. I'm not myself to-night."

"Bad news? What, Frank?" she said, wiping her eyes.

"The First National is going to reopen. I'm afraid that it's going to hurt us."

"How can it hurt us, dear?" she queried.

"The people haven't been the same lately. I'm somewhat uneasy."

"You're concealing something, Frank. What is it?"

"It's nothing, dear," he said. "Go ahead with your bridge. I'll arrange to be here."

Her face brightened.

"Oh, I'm so glad, Frank, for I had my heart set on it," and rising to her feet, she placed an arm on his shoulder and added: "You have business worries, don't you, dear?"

"Yes, Leta, more than you know anything about," he said with drooping eyes. "If I told you all the ups and downs of business, you'd be as gray as I am. By the way, do you like our new home?"

"Oh yes, but it's awfully big, and I feel like I'd like to fill it full of people. It gets monotonous with you gone so much. Where do you spend so much time uptown, anyway?"

"Oh, I usually have work to do at the bank in the evening."

Suspicion flickered in his wife's eyes as she said: "I've noticed that you never tell me anything any more — nothing about what you've done or who you've seen."

"Well, I don't do anything special, Leta, just the same old routine day after day."

"I feel that we should go out more, Frank. It has been a long time since we've gone anywhere together. I feel that we owe something to society."

Obviously checking the anger that flared in his bosom, he said: "I never did care for society, you know that."

"Yes, but I do," she declared firmly. "I get tired of your selfishness, Frank. Many wives are ruined by their husband's self-absorption. I'm not just your housekeeper!"

"I'll promise to do the best I can, Leta," and taking his hat, he left the house.

"The resort, I'll bet!" she speculated. "I'll follow him!"

She hastened upstairs and searched the closets. Selecting an old gown, she dressed herself with great care, penciled her eyebrows, and applied plenty of paint. She gazed at herself in the mirror. "Great!" she muttered to herself. Her hair, which she usually wore in a bob, had grown out, so she pinned it up in a small roll in the back, and slipped an old red tam over her head. She put on an old pair of glasses, walked quietly downstairs, and slipped into the night.

Reaching the resort, she opened the door and climbed the stairs to the dance hall. A cheap orchestra was playing. She slipped quietly into a corner and kept watch on what was going on. Women with weak and expressionless faces appeared gay as they kept time to the music. Soon she spied a large woman with straight bobbed hair and thick lips move past her, piloted by her husband. For a moment she could hardly believe her eyes. "So this is how he spends his time!" she muttered to herself. They appeared to be quite well acquainted and bent on having a good time. When the dance was finished, they seated themselves near her, and she nudged over where she could hear part of their conversation.

"I'm a bear to come here tonight," he said. "My wife and I quarreled, so here I am!"

The woman laughed in a coarse manner.

"Well, as long as you're here, you may as well enjoy yourself, don't you think? Come, let's dance this one." The orchestra had started up a lively fox trot.

When the dance was finished, the woman, who was obviously the hostess, came toward Leta and said:

"Hello there, stranger! Looking for someone?"

"Don't speak to me, you vixen!" Leta retorted, rising to her feet quickly. She walked in the direction of her husband, removed her tam and glasses and said: "So this is where you spend so much of your time, is it?"

Devins stared at his wife, terror stricken.

"My god, Leta, you here?" he gasped.

"Yes, you low-down contemptible tramp! This is a fine place for me to find you! Here's where you've been all the time when I thought you were working at the bank!" and grabbing a chair that stood close by, she raised it in the air and tried to bring it down on his head.

He dodged the blow, and stood staring at her, panic-stricken.

The orchestra stopped playing, and the crowd looked on in amazement. Obviously angered by their stare, Leta went wild.

"You dirty gang of degenerates!" she stamped. "You shouldn't be conducting such a joint as this, anyway. If I had some dynamite, I'd blow your place of business to pieces!" and with this parting shot, she rushed madly down the stairs.

Reaching home, she gathered together her jewels, her clothing, and a few other things, and placed them in a small steamer trunk. She telephoned for a taxi and waited. She jotted down a few lines on a sheet of paper, and laid it on the library table.

When the car arrived, she ordered the driver to load her trunk and bags in the back seat and drive to Hillsboro.

"I wish to take the train from there," she informed him.

Arriving in Hillsboro, she boarded the eastbound train upon its arrival.

Late that afternoon, she arrived in Chicago.

The sudden appearance of his wife in the dance hall, and the little drama that was enacted, caused Devins to wilt.

"Now I'm in a pretty pickle," he remarked to Belle Parker when his wife had gone.

The woman motioned for him to follow her, and laughingly said to the rest, "I'll see that he gets a few drinks; that'll put him out of his misery."

Day was breaking when Devins reached home. He flung himself down upon the lounge and went to sleep. It was late in the day when he awoke.

"Leta! Leta!" he called, but there was no answer.

He searched the house for his wife, but no trace of her could be found. Later, on the library table, he found a note addressed to him in her handwriting:

Frank:

I have been subjected to enough humiliation at your hands. I am going home. Do not attempt to follow me.

Leta.

He crumpled the note in his hand, and clinched his fists. He made his toilet with careful deliberation, and restlessly paced the floor. Obviously becoming desperate, he opened the drawer of his desk, took out a revolver, and examined it closely. He placed the gun to his forehead for a brief moment. "I'd be a coward to do it!" he muttered to himself. He gripped the edge of his desk and stared wildly into a large mirror that hung on the wall. His face was twisted with pain and remorse. "Why did I do it?" he kept muttering to himself.

When dusk fell, he grabbed his hat and made his way down the street. "I must talk to someone or I'll go insane!" he muttered to himself. With no sense of direction, he turned in at the Moss home and rapped at the door of the pastor's study.

Vane, who had been reading, was surprised when he saw who his caller was. He could see that Devins was in a state of great perturbation.

"Mr. Cheltenham, I must talk to someone," he said in a rather pathetic voice. "And I've come to you."

"Step in, please, Mr. Devins."

Devins, once inside the house, fumbled nervously with his hands.

"I'm in trouble, and I want your advice."

"All right, Devins, what's the trouble?"

"I have made some great discoveries during the past few hours. I've got myself into a jam. The bank examiners are hounding me; I will soon be arrested for misappropriating the bank's funds; I have been concealing figures for two months." Deep lines were visible in his face as he continued: "I've suffered misery that is hard to describe. The weary wanderings of my mind the past few hours have almost driven me insane. I can see now where I have blundered, and every impulse of my heart clamors for making a clean breast of things."

Vane was shocked terribly. Strange, he thought, that this man who had used unfair means to outdo his competitor, and forced old Eben Kyle to close his doors, had finally wrought his own destruction.

"Pitiable, indeed," he said, with a touch of sadness in his voice.

"Gazing into the future, I can see nothing but disgrace, and the loss of everything that makes life worth living," Devins went on. "I thought of taking my life, it would be a relief from the awful anguish that is eating my heart out."

Vane shook his head apprehensively.

"That isn't the way out," he said.

"The whole world seems to be crumbling beneath my feet," said Devins bitterly. "I thought that if I could talk to some-

one and tell them everything, that I'd feel better. All my life, Rev. Cheltenham, I've been taught to get what I want. During my childhood my parents were so busy getting rich they had but little time to devote to me. Money was what made the world go around—get the money. But I've learned a different way of life from you people here in these hills; you've shown me that there are other things in life more valuable than money. I can see my mistakes now, but it's too late to rectify them."

"It's never too late to repent, Devins," Vane said softly. "God's tender mercy is there for every sinner who confesses his guilt."

"Well, I guess that I've dropped about as low as a man can drop. I've allowed lust and greed to get the better of me. My greatest mistake was in purchasing the Andrews residence. I used the bank's funds for that," he swallowed hard as he uttered the words. "I will willingly give up everything that I possess, but it won't cover the loss. I've been gambling some, too. I bought the property to please my wife, and last night she flew into a rage and left me."

Vane gazed at the man so stooped in sin and humiliation with deep pity in his heart.

"I can't understand how you let yourself go so far into sin, Devins," he said zealously.

Devins fidgeted nervously.

"Well, the truth of the matter is, I've shown myself pitifully weak where I should have been strong. I know, sir, that you are a minister of the gospel, and I just had to talk to someone. I realize I haven't made many friends here, but I never craved human companionship more than now . . ."

Vane was silent for a moment.

"All this could have been avoided so easily, Devins, had you only been more congenial and willing to cooperate with your fellowmen. You've tried to be a lone wolf, and that at-

titude never pays dividends in a small town. You can repent of your sins, and in so far as you can, make restitution. You face an embezzlement charge, and will no doubt have to serve a term."

Devins' face bore a humble look.

"I realize that, and I've resigned myself to such a fate. I'm ready to surrender myself to the authorities."

Vane observed that his mental and nervous condition was pitiable.

"Every man, Devins, should endeavor to live a life that will enable him to go forth with a good heart and a good spirit, but instead of that, the majority of them live selfish, artificial lives and reap a harvest of remorse. There's only one thing to do as I see it, and that is to make a complete surrender of yourself to God, take your medicine, and make restitution."

Devins sighed retrospectively. "If we all had our lives to live over again, Rev. Cheltenham, a great many of us would do differently. Isn't it strange how we have to be brought face to face with disaster; how we have to be humbled and humiliated before we come to ourselves?"

Vane believed that a truly repentant man should be placed in the hands of the Almighty, no matter what crime he had committed. He knew that circumstances, environment, false training in youth, and many other things contributed toward people's downfall, and he felt that it was his duty as a minister of the gospel to help them, to point the way to the everlasting life.

"You can make a new start, Devins. Frankly tell the courts and the people what you have told me."

Devins moved restlessly in his chair.

"That is what I wish to do," he said resignedly. "Rid my mind of the burdensome load that is eating my heart out and be free. When a man feels that the whole world is against him, it is hard to stand up."

The two men sat for a long while in meditative thought, and strangely there swept over Vane a deep pity for the man who would soon be cut off from all human ties. He had had his day, and would soon be lodged in jail and looked upon as a criminal. Instead of building up friendships, he had sought money and power, and what a miserable failure he had been. He took up his Bible and turned to the first chapter of Isaiah and read the 18th verse: "*Come, now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*"

Kneeling down, Vane lifted his eyes to heaven and prayed an earnest, sincere prayer for the man's soul. When he finished, Devins was shaking with emotion, and rising to his feet, he clasped his hand warmly.

"Reverend Cheltenham, from the bottom of my heart, I thank you. Your human interest has helped me. If you had refused to listen to me, I should have been distracted and God only knows what I would have done. As it is, I go forth a better man. How can prison harm me now? I've been virtually a prisoner all my life!"

Vane was pleased at this reaction.

"I am glad to be of service to you, Devins," he said. "I am dreadfully sorry that you have brought this trouble upon yourself. There is always hope for the man who is repentant. My advice to you is to confess everything, make a new start, and out of it all will come peace to your soul, satisfaction to your heart!"

"I will, Rev. Cheltenham—honest I will. Good-bye, and thank you!" His voice broke on the last words.

The following morning news reached Vane's ears that Devins had surrendered himself to the authorities and made a clean breast of everything. Unable to furnish bail, he was taken to Hillsboro and lodged in jail. The examiners were

in charge of the bank, and the doors closed temporarily until a receiver was appointed.

Two days later Vane visited Devins in jail. He had never heard a word from his wife, there was no one to offer sympathy. As he watched the former banker tossing to and fro upon his cell cot, tormented by a guilty conscience, he saw that he was truly repentant. He gave him a Bible, and implored him to read its pages, assuring him of the consolation that he would find there.

The law took its course. Devins' trial came up in March. He was convicted and sentenced to the state penitentiary for embezzlement. His property was placed in the hands of the courts, his household goods sold to satisfy his creditors.

**V**ANE, alone in his study, the rain lashing at the windows, sighed retrospectively.

He had lived through some agonizing days and weeks. But when things seemed darkest, there came a ray of light. Would he yet win? Would God win? Of course God would win! He had put his trust in the Lord, and he believed with all his heart that God would never forsake those who put their trust in Him. And he was willing to abide God's time.

From the utter breakdown of Devins it seemed evident that God's time was at hand!

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in."

In came Mrs. Moss with a troubled look on her face.

"I want to talk about Elva," she said. "She is morbid and low-spirited all the time, and has developed such an ugly disposition. She seems to have lost all interest in life, and doesn't even eat the nourishing food that she should have."

Vane had observed that Elva's vivacity, once so pronounced, her gift of gab and ready wit, were slowly passing into a studied reticence, and her interest in other people had dwindled into an indifference which was appalling. He had also observed that she had been gossiped about and slighted by the rest of the young people. His heart ached for her.

He straightened the papers on his desk and said:

"She needs God, Mrs. Moss! Only His love can heal! I understand she has never been converted."

"That's what I told her, Brother Cheltenham, but she doesn't seem to be as yet in a mood for surrender. I presume that she is still fond of Steve. I wonder if I shouldn't try and bring them together again. I hear that there is quite a change in the boy."

"I think that he is the one who could help her most to get back her proper perspective," Vane said seriously. "She must forget everything that has happened, drive it out of her mind, and start anew. As long as she has done no wrong, she has nothing to be ashamed of."

Mrs. Moss was not crying, but her eyes were luminous with unshed tears.

"If it were possible, I would like to take her and flee from here, to get away from the Seven Corners busy-bodies—away from the snubs, the heartaches, the humiliation of it all," she said vehemently.

Vane nodded. "I know how you feel, Mrs. Moss, but you mustn't harbor resentment. Try and exercise a forgiving spirit. That attitude will bring more satisfaction to your heart. I'll talk to Steve, and some of the young people. Elva has more friends here than she realizes. We'll see if something can't be done to rouse her from the lethargy that she has drifted into."

After she had gone, Vane sat for a long time staring into the shadows of the room, brooding over the troubles of his people. So many disturbing things had happened in Seven Corners; banks and business houses had failed, hearts had been broken, reputations shattered. With the forces of love and hate, of truth and untruth, arrayed against each other, he knew that his final reliance must be upon God. Only He could help.

That Wednesday night he conducted a Gospel meeting. The services were scheduled for 7:30. The old church pealed forth a hearty welcome. The members of the choir were all

there, and these lusty young voices sang the old-time gospel songs with a great deal of enthusiasm.

The church was full that night.

During the last few days Vane had been tipped off that several of the patrons of the resort were fugitive lawbreakers, some of whom the federal authorities were looking for. Already one or two arrests had been made.

This and the fact that Devins had completely collapsed and disappeared had turned the sympathies of many people toward the young minister. There were many people in the audience whom he had not seen for weeks and months.

Ezra Doolittle was there. So were Elva and her mother.

Vane burst forth in one of the most soul-stirring sermons he had ever preached.

Dolores was at the organ. After the sermon she led the choir in a beautiful invitation hymn.

*"I've wandered far away from God, now I'm coming home."*

Vane continued: "Friends, are you lonely? Is your heart troubled? After a life-time in pursuit of worldly pleasures, do you find that there is still something missing in your life? If so, you need Jesus! You need His cleansing power! If you are in need of spiritual help, won't you come and give me your hand!"

A noise came from the back seat, and all eyes bulged when they saw Ezra coming down the aisle with a rapt look on his face. His wife was there to meet him.

"God bless you, Ezra, you've made me so happy!" she said.

Evangeline, his daughter, stepped down from the choir and stood beside her father.

"Praise the Lord!" said Vane. "Have you a word to say, Ezra?"

Ezra faced the audience, and with his face radiant, said:

"I was lost, but I am found. I have been through all the horrors of hell, but at last I am saved!"

"Amen!" the pastor shouted.

Elva was the next to go to the altar. Steven Hilyard, who was seated near the back, followed close behind her, and surrendered himself to Christ. Many others followed.

Elva was crying now, and Steve sat with his arm around her trying to comfort her.

Here was the beginning of the harvest. There had been sowing with tears. Here was reaping with joy. Vane went home that night with a light step and a song of thanksgiving in his heart.

"Bless Jehovah, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His Holy Name."

Yes, before he retired he read the 103rd psalm in praise and adoration and thanksgiving to Him Whose lovingkindness is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him.

THE First National had re-opened under certain restrictions with Andrews in charge, and he had allowed his name to be placed at the head of the People's Ticket for mayor at the spring election.

"ANDREWS FOR MAYOR" placards were in almost every shop window, and the *Sentinel* that week carried a large photograph of the People's candidate and the entire front page was devoted to a vivid description of the sterling qualities of Sylvester Andrews.

Welborn spent a great deal of his time at the resort. He catered to the support of the Parker element.

Parker stormed and swore all sorts of destruction upon himself if Welborn was defeated.

"We'll see, we'll see," he said, one afternoon when the two men were talking things over. "If the election turns out as I expect it will, it will be a clean sweep for you, Judge."

Judge Welborn rubbed the palms of his coarse hands together. Parker's words pleased him.

"Andrews is popular with a certain element," Parker went on. "The people who are backing him would like to close up my place of business, and turn the street lights out at nine o'clock. I tell you, Judge, he doesn't stand a chance."

"Here's hoping," replied the judge, rising to his feet, and slapping his hat farther back on his head. "Guess I'll see what's going on down the street."

"Good idea," nodded Parker. "Rake in every vote you can."

Andrews made no campaign for the office. He had a small article inserted in the local paper which read: "If elected Mayor, I shall strive to work for the best interests of the town and the people."

"Why doesn't Andrews get out and make a campaign?" asked Eben Kyle, when he met Will Blake on the street.

"I'll tell you why," Mr. Blake returned briskly. "Andrews doesn't want to mix in politics. He doesn't like mudslinging, and moreover, he is so firmly implanted in the hearts and minds of the people by now that he doesn't need to make a campaign."

"You think that he'll be elected, then?" quizzed Eben.

"Why, I know it," said Mr. Blake assuredly. "Welborn has been leaning more and more toward the Parker element. Under a different administration the resort would never have been allowed to operate. Andrews, if elected, will rid the town of the menace. How's business with you, Eben?"

Eben was now running a shoe shop in the rear of the First National Bank building.

"Oh, I'm managing to make a living," Eben said complacently.

The People's party had a Rally in the Town Hall the night preceding election. They marched to the hall, led by the Drum Corps, with flags flying and a large banner reading: "**VOTE THE PEOPLE'S TICKET FOR CLEAN CITY GOVERNMENT.**" The sidewalks were lined with people as the parade passed, many waving their hats and handkerchiefs at the marchers.

The hall was crowded, the people couldn't all find seats. Will Blake was the principal speaker.

"Friends," he began, his voice rich and deep, "in the past two years we have seen our town change from a peace-loving community into a hot-bed of hate and uncertainty. . . . It has

been made the dumping ground for all the rough characters in the state, yet nothing has been done by the present administration to stop it. We have in our town a place of questionable repute, which is undermining the morals of our young people, yet our present administration has done nothing to correct it."

Loud yells of applause came from the women's section. Men clapped and cheered, some stomping the floor with their feet.

"Now, you need no introduction to the man who heads the People's Ticket. We have seen him fall, a victim of maliciousness, and we have seen him rise again, this time to stay!"

It was several moments before the noise subsided before he could continue.

"Down with Welborn! Down with the resort!" was the cry of many.

A few of Welborn's followers were there, stand-patters they called themselves, and occasionally they let out whoops and yells for their candidate; some threats and cursing came from the rear of the room.

"I regret exceedingly that our candidate couldn't be here tonight to speak for himself," Blake went on. "Now all of you who stand for clean government, a better town in which to live, vote for Sylvester Andrews when you go to the polls tomorrow! I thank you."

The noise was deafening.

Other speakers followed Blake, after which the band played "*The Stars and Stripes Forever*" as the crowd dispersed.

Once the mad throng was in the street, they began to yell: "Down with Welborn! Down with the resort!"

The following day was bright and clear, and it looked as if a good vote would be polled. The people were on the street early. The election was of absorbing interest to Vane, and he

didn't hesitate to let people know where he stood. He was back of Andrews one hundred per cent.

Judge Welborn, Vane decided, was no longer capable of holding a public office of any sort. Many of the better families had lost all respect for him. It was a shame after all his years of public service to be put out in disgrace, and he really felt sorry for the man.

During the noon hour the streets were full of people, and Vane noticed there was a more hopeful look in their faces. Could it be that the people were waking up at last? He met Elva and Steve on the street, and they seemed gay spirited and happy again.

Sylvester Andrews at the First National didn't appear to be in the least perturbed over the election. He greeted all callers cheerfully.

Vane stayed close around the polls and watched what was going on. Parker came raging down the street like a mad man, urging every man that he met to support Welborn. When it came time for the polls to close, interest was tense. The crowd hung close to the voting place waiting for the final count.

"The polls have closed!" yelled Parker, waving his hat. "The count will soon be in!" His eyes gleamed with excitement.

The crowd started moving up the street in the direction of the school yard.

The votes counted, Andrews had been elected by a goodly majority.

Down the street the People's party marched, celebrating their victory. The cars were draped with red, white, and blue streamers.

Turning toward Parker, Welborn said: "Come along!" and the two men turned and walked rapidly in the direction of the resort.

The result of the election was extremely gratifying to Vane. For once in his life he felt as if he would have liked to join in a genuine celebration of the occasion. But he went home and poured out his soul into a fervent prayer of thanksgiving to Him Who had given the victory.

DOWN at the resort, Parker was pacing back and forth like a mad man. His place had been practically deserted for a week, and in a quarrelsome and sullen mood, he climbed the stairs to the second floor and faced his wife.

Ill health and fast living had taken their toll from Belle Parker. Her large face was sallow and her generous mouth was set in hard lines. She was wearing a wrinkled and faded old red dress, and her hair was disheveled. Her eyes were dull, her lips set.

"How's business, Tim?" she asked, obviously startled by the melancholy look in his face.

"Rotten!" Parker growled, his eyes glassy. "We've got to raise some money somehow or dig out."

She turned on him with a look of anguish in her eyes.

"I'm thinking the best thing we can do is to make ourselves scarce around here. What do you think about it?"

"Oh, let's not be in a hurry!" he scowled. "I expect to make some good money here before I'm through."

"Well, if the officers ever get on our trail it's good-bye, you know that!"

"You're not getting cold feet are you?" he said with a highly exasperating expression. "Wait a few days, things will break for us yet. When this Devins case is forgotten our trade will come back. Let gossip go its rounds and it'll die down."

"No, Tim, our trade will never come back," she said firmly. "The orchestra has refused to come any more unless they get

a check in advance. The beer man will be here tomorrow, and there is no money for him. We're through, that's all!"

"You're too easily discouraged, I'm afraid," he said. "I'll get some money from Cullimore and pay off the bills. If he don't come across, I'll wring his neck!"

"That preacher has us licked, Tim. He's a forceful man, and with this new city administration we won't be able to keep open."

"Don't worry," said Parker vehemently. "I'll have to even things with him before I leave! I'll teach him to tend to his own business!"

"We'd best skip while the going is good, Tim."

"Don't worry, babe, everything'll be all right!"

When Parker reached the lower floor, he was confronted by four police officers.

"You are Sid Parker, I believe."

Parker's face paled, his eye twitched. Sheer terror held him speechless. He glared defiantly at the officers.

"This is Ballard, men, take him into custody!" the chief said gruffly.

"Hey!" shouted Parker irately. "You can't do this!"

One of the officers placed a pair of handcuffs on Parker.

Parker stomped and went off into thunderous blasphemy, but the officers soon quieted him.

"Tim Ballard, we hold a warrant for your arrest on the charge of murder! You haven't forgotten that gun battle in St. Louis when you killed Tom Morgan, have you?" the chief queried.

Parker's face flushed, his eyes stared, his teeth gritted, and his whole frame shook with emotion.

"This is an outrage!" he shouted furiously, trying to break away.

"Useless, my good man," said the chief. "Our men have been watching you for two days. Clever ruse, burying your-

self out here in this quiet place, wasn't it?" and turning to his men he added: "Search his living quarters, men!"

Parker's eyes flashed fire.

The officers soon returned from the floor above with Belle Parker. When she spied the handcuffs on Sid, she glared at the men defiantly.

"Got him in irons, eh? What's the meaning of all this, I'd like to know?"

The chief took another photograph from his pocket and compared the likeness.

"Just as I expected!" he muttered. "We'll take the woman, too, men!"

"Oh, Timmy!" Belle Parker wailed. "Surely you're not going to allow them to take me, a poor woman —" she wavered, gulped and stopped.

Parker's face was maniacally tense, his wife was white and trembling. They cast surreptitious glances at each other.

Parker's eyes were full of fury.

"I see you call him by his proper name," said the chief. "Tim Ballard, notorious gangster and murderer. Hiding out here among these good people. They're looking for you in several states, Ballard, but Missouri will keep you for a few years! And you," he said, pointing directly at Belle Parker, "are Laura Levine, thief and shoplifter. We want you, too!"

Belle Parker screamed and fell flat to the floor. The officers picked her up and placed her on a chair.

In the street, the news spread like wildfire, and in a few moments throngs of people surrounded the place.

"What has happened here?" one asked another.

"Secret Service Men from St. Louis," a bystander informed. "They have just arrested Parker on a murder charge. . . ."

Vane, who happened to be on the street, made his way to where the crowd was gathered in front of the resort.

"Gangway!" yelled the officers.

"They're bringing them out!" said Will Blake excitedly.

Belle Parker came first with an officer on each side of her. Parker followed meekly, hanging his head in shame.

The officers ushered them in a waiting car and sped off with them.

Vane gawked with the rest as the car disappeared in a cloud of dust.

"Good riddance!" he muttered.

"God be praised!" Will Blake responded.

"I guess from what Cullimore said they've got it on him all right," Will Blake said. "Murdered a policeman in St. Louis in a gun battle."

In a few days, the excitement had died down. The town settled down again to work, and the resort was no more. The building was padlocked, and steps taken by the New Administration to prevent a recurrence of the evil.

THE Andrews family moved back into their old home the first of May, and preparations were going forward for Tom and Phyllis' wedding. It was eminently satisfying to Vane to see them back there again. He stopped, one evening, on his way downtown to express his gratification.

"We have profited by the move, Brother Cheltenham," Marian said heartily. "We can appreciate our home more. This is part of life, you know; joy, sorrow, suffering, they all go together. We must have a touch of each, I presume to make life complete. Even tears, shed at intervals, help to keep us human."

Vane agreed with her, and after a few moments' visit with the family, he moseyed on down the street. He came upon Tom Blake down in front of the drug store and they chatted for a short while. During the conversation, Tom told him that Harold Loomis was leaving for South America in a few days.

"Dolores is going with him, I presume," Vane said thoughtfully. "I've noticed that they're quite fond of each other."

Tom laughed and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Sis doesn't care anything for any man but you! Don't you know that?"

"But me?" gasped Vane. "Impossible. I thought at one time that she cared for me, but when she started going with Harold, I gave up hope." He told him about his affair with Maxine, and how she had broken the engagement.

Tom gave his arm a tight squeeze and said:

"Suppose you go up and tell Sis what you've just told me. Unless I'm mistaken, she'll be glad to hear it."

Vane's heart leaped.

"Really, Tom, do you mean it? I'll go this minute."

Dolores, wearing a dark silk dress which enhanced her loveliness, was out spraying the lawn. When she spied the young pastor approaching, she dropped the hose and walked in his direction with a smile on her face.

"Good evening, Brother Cheltenham!" she said hospitably. "Won't you come in the house?"

The shadows were gathering by now, and he beckoned her to a lawn bench nearby which was almost hidden by shrubbery.

"I came to talk to you, Dolores," he said, taking one of her hands in his own, "about a matter of vital importance to us both."

She made no effort to release her hand from his grasp, but stared at him with a question mark in her blue eyes.

"I came to tell you how much I love you!" he said earnestly. "But first I must tell you of another girl whom I was engaged to." He told her about his affair with Maxine, and how it had come to an end. "I know now that I never really loved her," he added.

"I knew there was another girl, Vane. It doesn't take news long to get about in a small town. That is why I resigned as your assistant."

His arm stole about her waist.

"You do care for me then, Dolores?" he said happily. "My affair with Maxine was all a mistake. You're the only woman that I have ever really loved!"

They were silent for a moment. Dolores rested her chin in her hands, and her eyes, very wide open and very grave, looked into his.

"I do care for you, Vane — I love you dearly."

She leaned her head against his shoulder, and he held her in a tight embrace.

"Asking you to share my rather uninteresting life is demanding quite a sacrifice from you, I'm afraid," he said tenderly. "I haven't anything to offer you but love."

"And isn't that greater than anything else?" she asked, squeezing his hand tight. "I would rather be the proud possessor of your love than to have millions!"

"You have made me very happy, Dolores. With you as its mistress, the old parsonage will be a veritable heaven!"

There suddenly crept into his vision a large community hall where his recreational experiments could be carried out.

"Our new department has grown so steadily here lately that we do not have adequate space to take care of it. I've been wondering if we couldn't get hold of the building that formerly housed the resort, and turn it into a gymnasium and recreational hall for our young people until we can raise funds to build a new one."

"That's an excellent idea, Vane," she said quickly. "It's the largest building in town. If the owner would remodel it and redecorate it on the inside, it would serve our purpose very nicely."

"With Parker's element out of the way, we can make progress."

"I wonder what brought you to Seven Corners, and to me, Vane?" she said, her voice vibrant with a deeper note.

"Possibly it was God's plan to bring us together, dear," he replied.

They rose and walked to the end of the shrubbery. The moon suddenly appeared from behind the hills, and as they watched the magnificent scene, their hearts were full. Vane thought that he had never seen the hills look as beautiful as they did this evening in the moonlight. He watched the

girl at his side in rapture. He knew that her heart belonged to him.

"Isn't love wonderful, dear?" he said. "And isn't it comforting to feel that ours will endure?"

She drew closer and said:

"Motivated by a high purpose, it will grow!"

The moon rose higher in the heavens, the soft mellow light flooded the earth. It had come at last, the one thing that Vane needed to make his life complete. They walked back to the bench and sat for a long while drinking in the beauty of the night, and making plans for the future.

And as they sat there, charmed by all the beauty about them, they made a solemn resolution — a resolution to dedicate their lives to the Christ they both loved.

T H E   E N D









